PS3™ PlayStation 3 | PSP® PlayStation Portable | PS VITA PlayStation Vita

PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Issue 058 May 2012

Sly's back!

Thieves in Time is Sly Cooper's best adventure yet

CUTTING EDGE INFO
Assassin's Creed III
REVEALED

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 58 (May 2012)

REVIEWED
Mass Effect 3
Street Fighter X Tekken
Silent Hill: Downpour
Ninja Gaiden 3

FUTURE GAMES
What to expect from PS4

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Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION
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MAX PAYNE 3 **GRAVITY RUSH** SOUTH PARK **RESIDENT EVIL**

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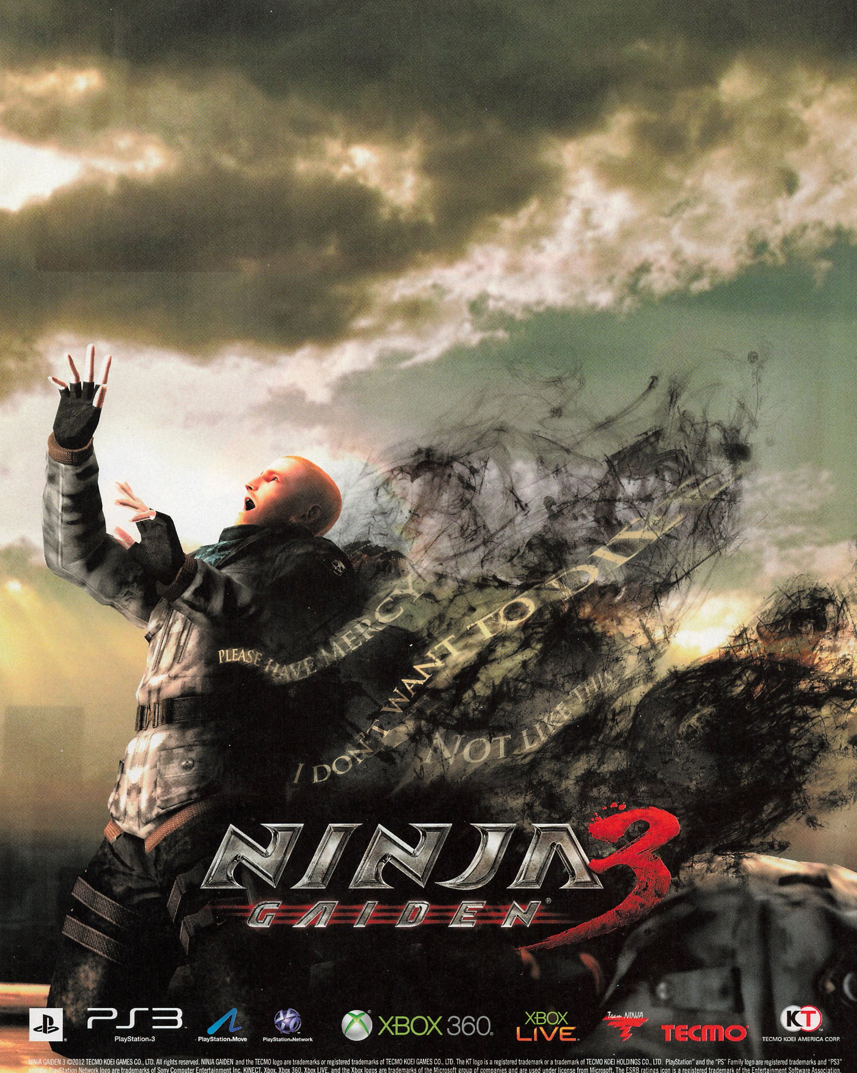
忍
I AM NOT A HERO
I AM A MURDERER
I WILL KILL TO SAVE ANOTHER
MATURE 17+ ™
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
TEAMNINJA-STUDIO.COM/NG3


PLEASE HAVE MERCY
I DON'T WANT TO DIE
NOT LIKE THIS
NINJA GAIDEN 3
PlayStation 3
PlayStation Move
PlayStation Network
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
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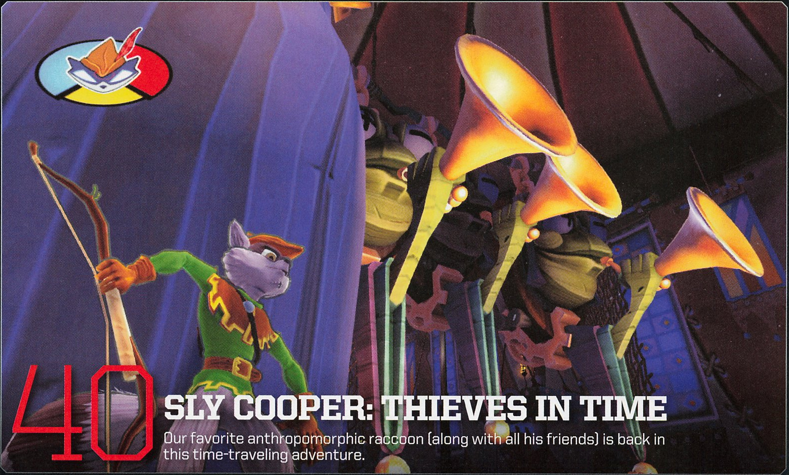
MAY 2012

COVER FEATURE



40 **SLY COOPER: THIEVES IN TIME**

Our favorite anthropomorphic raccoon (along with all his friends) is back in this time-traveling adventure.

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Developer Danger Close spills the beans on *Medal of Honor Warfighter.*

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70 **MASS EFFECT 3**

The Reapers have begun their invasion in this stunningly large franchise finale. With the galaxy facing complete annihilation, does *Mass Effect 3* deliver? Find out in our in-depth review.

Playing with money

Remembering who the customer really is

Much of the conversation in the PTOM offices often revolves around the notion of value. We go back and forth on issues of game length, day one DLC, reselling used games... All of these topics—and the related arguments for and against them—are tied directly to the economics of our pastime. We're well versed on the positions of publishers, developers, retailers, and even games media in this equation, but too often we, as an industry, forget the consumer.

Value was a major consideration in PTOM's review of *Journey* in our last issue. The PSN title has received critical acclaim and our "great" rating of 8 out of 10 was actually amongst the lowest scores the game received. Our reviewer, Mikel Reparaz, agreed that *Journey* was a unique and beautiful experience—a game perhaps worthy of a score of 9 or 10 if judged solely on its artistic merits. But he found the game's $15 price tag for two-hours of playtime left him a tad unsatisfied. Although people's perceptions of what constitutes value may differ, I'm glad it was a consideration in Mikel's assessment.

I've always considered it a privilege to be able to review games for a living. I remember how disappointed I was as a kid when the game I purchased with my limited funds turned out to be a dud. My motivation when I review a game is always tied to the idea that I don't ever want to be the one that steers a gamer wrong.

Sometimes, as in the case with *Journey*, the score doesn't tell the whole story. It's an exceptional game with a significant caveat, and ultimately, it's each gamer's discretion to determine whether it's a trip worth taking. But I'm glad PTOM still remembers that it's never our money that's being spent.

Roger Burchill
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Art Director
twitter.com/ArtKenPTOM

Why is the "T" in Ken Bousquet's last name silent? Because Ken Bousquet doesn't have time for all those letters, and he certainly doesn't have time for all your stupid questions!

Scott Butterworth
Senior Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

Sadly, Scott Butterworth is not related to the famous Mrs. Butterworth syrup empire. He is, however, the son and hier of nothing in particular (or so says Morrissey).

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/RyanTaljonick

We asked Ryan Taljonick why his last name just sounds like a bunch of first names. Turns out they're actually the names of his various personalities...according to Nick.

Anne Lewis
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

When we discovered that Anne Lewis' name is an anagram for "alien news," we became suspicious. When she opened fire with a lazer gun, we became certain. And also, dead.

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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

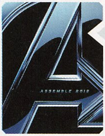
MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

MAY 01

Gore Galore

The more a movie can get us to feel sick, the better. *The Wizard of Gore/The Gore Gore Girls* Blu-ray double feature will have us both retching and laughing.

BLOOD-DRENCHED DOUBLE FEATURE
THE GORE GORE GIRLS
THE WIZARD OF GORE
TWICE THE GORE FROM HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS



04

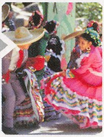
A for Avengers

Earth's Mightiest Heroes hit the big screen today and we can't wait for quitting time to hit the theater.

05

Cinco de Mayo

Hoy es Cinco de Mayo! That may be all of what we recall from high school Spanish, but today is a day of heritage and pride for Mexican-Americans.

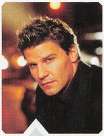


PS3
STARHAWK
RP

08

Yippee Ki-Yay

Starhawk is out today and we are so ready to go all "space cowboy" on the final frontier.



EAT HUFU™
THE HEALTHY HUMAN FLESH ALTERNATIVE

11

Eat What You Want Day

Oh yeah? What if we wanted to eat people or something? Not that we do. Of course we don't want to eat people. Well, we don't always want to eat people.

13

This One's for You, Mom

Mother's Day is a day for most of us to be thankful we don't have a crazed experiment with psychic powers for a mother.

PS3
MAX PAYNE 3
RP

15

Sex, Drugs, and Bullet Time

Our favorite grizzled former detective with a dark past makes his return today in *Max Payne 3*.

In stores:
Game of Thrones

16

They Call Him Angel...

Today is David Boreanaz's 41st birthday and according to Anne, well... He's just so... *siiigh*.

17

Comic Book Guy is Not Impressed

Comic Cuts, the first weekly comic paper, began publishing in London on this day in 1890.

18

Oh Liz Lemon

One of our favorite funny girls, Tina Fey, celebrates her birthday today and, yeah, we so want to go to there.

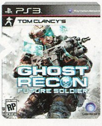
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

22

The Future is Now

We have a top-secret mission today: head out and pick up *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* and shoot some fools in the face.

In stores:
Dragon's Dogma



MIB III
MEN IN BLACK

25

Back in Black

"Here come the Men in Black, the galaxy defenders." We still know all the words to that song and we'll be singing them while we wait for *Men in Black III* to start.

28

Amnesty International Day

Amnesty International is a worldwide organization that has fought for decades to prevent human rights abuses.

29

Anime Age

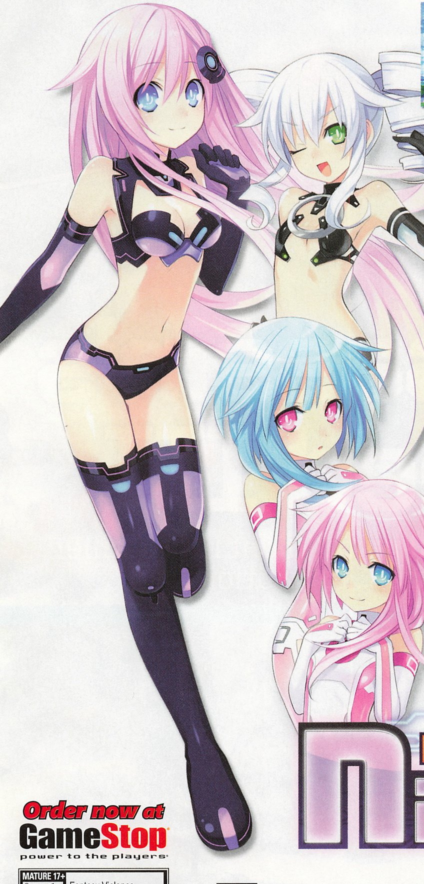
The *Dragon Age* anime, *Dawn of the Seeker*, arrives on Blu-ray.

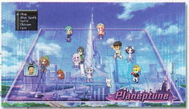
In stores:
Resistance: Burning Skies (Vita)

30

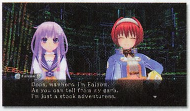
* Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.

PERIL IN GAMINDUSTRI!
CPU CANDIDATES, ASSEMBLE!

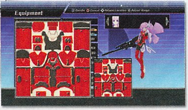




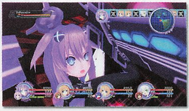
OVER 12 PLAYABLE CHARACTERS!
Enough game console personifications to create your dream team!


Falcom
Oops, manners. I'm Falcom.
As you can tell from my garb.
I'm just a stock adventuress.

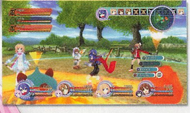
MULTIPLE ENDINGS
Friendships made during the game affect your ending!



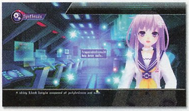
TEXTURE CUSTOMIZATION
Customize Nepgear's transformed version with your own image files!



TRANSFORMATION
Transform to unleash the girls' true powers and special abilities!



FREE-ROAMING BATTLE SYSTEM
Run freely around the battle map to set up spatial and dynamic strategies!



ITEM DEVELOPMENT
Develop new items to make your journey easier—and more fun!

Nepgear, the CPU Candidate of Planeptune and younger sister to Neptune, sets out on her quest with IF and Compa to regain Gamindustri's prosperity, stop the syndicate of evil that Arfoire created, and set her sister free! During her travels across the world, Nepgear will encounter friends new and old, meet the other CPU Candidates, and take care of any monsters that stand in her way in this classic JRPG tale of good versus evil!

HYPERDIMENSION Neptunia mk2™

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

PS3™

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The Big 10

Stories that everyone's talking about...

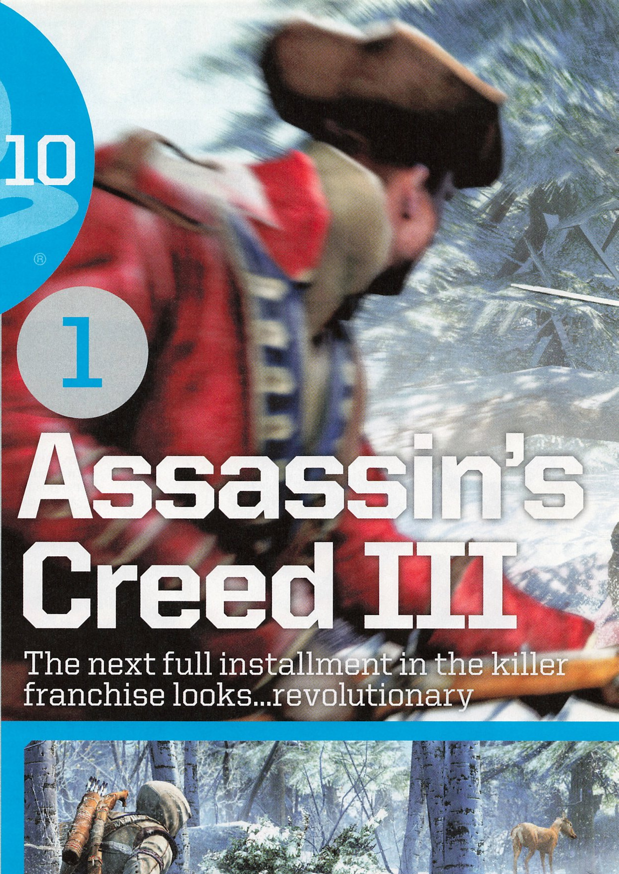
More War
The shooter war continues thanks to new BF3 and MW3 DLC.
»Page 12

Gravity Rush
We speak with the devs of Vita's most intriguing new IP.
»Page 16

Gear Up
Time to show your PS3 some love with these upgrades.
»Page 18

Moving On
Three good reasons to dust off your PS Move controllers.
»Page 22

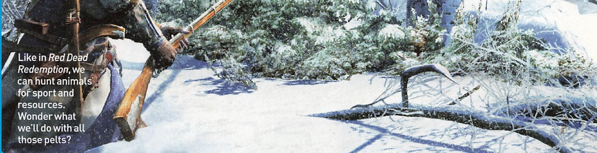
The Great Debate
Bonus content or pure greed? PTOM eds disect day one DLC.
»Page 24



1

Assassin's Creed III

The next full installment in the killer franchise looks...revolutionary



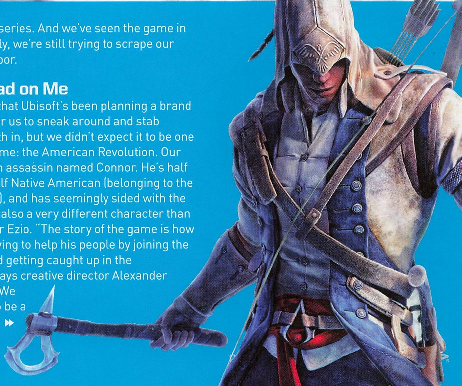
Like in *Red Dead Redemption*, we can hunt animals for sport and resources. Wonder what we'll do with all those pelts?

When Ezio's chapter in *Assassin's Creed* finally came to a close, we said *requiescat in pace* to one of this generation's most iconic heroes. But we also had a lot of questions. What's next for Desmond? In what era would the next *Assassin's Creed* take place? And, most importantly, how the hell would Ubisoft crank out the next game in less than a year? Well, they're not.

Assassin's Creed III has been in development for about two years—by the time it hits store shelves on October 30, it will have had the longest development cycle of any *Assassin's Creed* game since the original. Developing the project is the same core crew from the first two games, and they've absorbed some of the top talent from both *Brotherhood* and *Revelations* to supplement their ranks. Think about that for a second. This means *Assassin's Creed III* is in the hands of the strongest dev team that has ever existed throughout the course of the series. And we've seen the game in action—frankly, we're still trying to scrape our jaws off the floor.

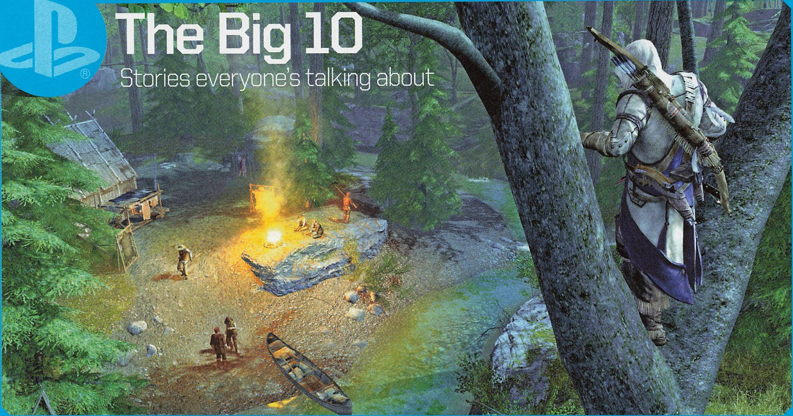
Don't Tread on Me

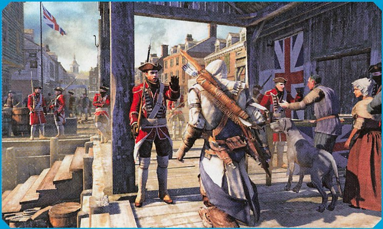
It's no secret that Ubisoft's been planning a brand new setting for us to sneak around and stab people to death in, but we didn't expect it to be one so close to home: the American Revolution. Our new hero is an assassin named Connor. He's half British and half Native American (belonging to the Mohawk tribe), and has seemingly sided with the Patriots. He's also a very different character than either Altaïr or Ezio. "The story of the game is how he ends up trying to help his people by joining the Assassins and getting caught up in the Revolution," says creative director Alexander Hutchinson. "We wanted him to be a different type



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

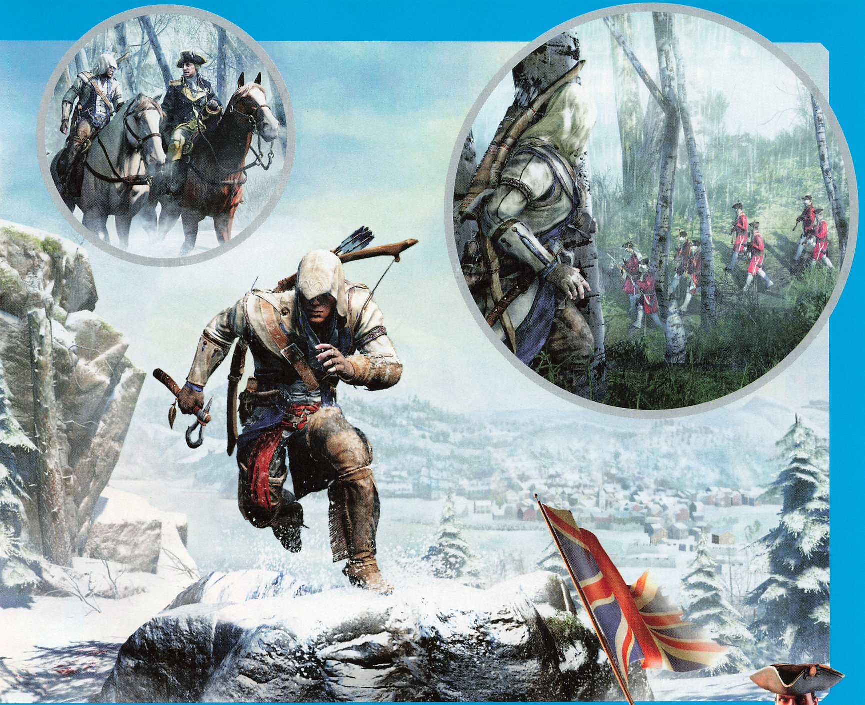




Something happened in Connor's past that drives him to join the Assassins. We'd be willing to bet this has something to do with it.

of hero. For Altaïr, it's a job; Ezio, revenge. We wanted someone who's more a protector of the people, a defender of the people."

So we don't really know much about Connor's past, Desmond's role (other than there will be "more Desmond than ever"), or even what the Templars are planning...but we *do* know we'll be exploring the port cities of Boston and New York City in their infancy. Elegant wooden structures populate both, with wide avenues dividing subsections of the cities, a stark contrast to the tight alleyways of Rome and Florence. And in these famous cities, we'll encounter famous historical figures: Both George Washington and Benjamin Franklin have been confirmed to play a role in the game (who wants to bet ol' Ben is our new Leonardo da Vinci?). While we can't wait to tear through Redcoats in the dockyards of 18th century Massachusetts, we're most looking forward to navigating the wilderness of the American frontier, which accounts for approximately 30 percent of the game. It is in this new setting that we'll also partake in storied battles from American history, including the Battle of Bunker Hill. As for the frontier, think of it as *Assassin's Creed* meets *Red Dead Redemption*—most of the climbing and parkouring is done on tree limbs and cliff faces as we hunt officers and generals in the style exhibited in the Mel Gibson film *The Patriot*. The tree running looks especially fantastic, a feat the developers are proud to say they've accomplished in their attempt to make *Assassin's Creed III* less about boxy man-made locations and more about organic environments. Each setting in the game even has a winter variation as the timeline progresses and seasons change. Snow will play an important role in traversal, affecting the movement speed of both Connor and his enemies.



Musketeers

Because guns are ever more prevalent as the *Assassin's Creed* timeline moves up in history, most of the human targets we'll be hunting are equipped with muskets. Thankfully they're inaccurate, unreliable, and take forever to reload. Enemies have one shot. If they miss, Connor will be ready to strike, often while dual-wielding two one-handed weapons—including his tomahawk.

Combat, like in the first two games, is focused more on hunting specific targets than on large encounters. We watched as Connor hopped along tree branches, stalking a group of British soldiers as they struggled to walk through a thick blanket of snow. Once above his prey, he used the new rope dart (a rope with a metal dart attached to one end) to hang an enemy on a tree branch. Connor then dropped down from his perch (via the rope he used to hang the soldier) and engaged the rest of the group. The remaining three soldiers fired their muskets and missed. We watched in awe as Connor mercilessly slaughtered his opponents, parrying musket bayonets with his dagger before finishing the job with his tomahawk or hidden blade. And yes, Connor can use muskets too.

In an attempt to get away from Ezio's stab-walk-stab tendencies, the developers implemented new hit-and-run assassinations. These allow Connor to insta-kill targets during a dead sprint without slowing or stopping. It's a perfect tactic for taking out officers while their bodyguards spend precious seconds reloading their muskets, allowing us to make a clean escape. Speaking of escapes, we're willing to wager Ubisoft won't hear a whole lot of complaints about the annual release of *Assassin's Creed* titles once this entry hits shelves. Well, at least until *Assassin's Creed III: Brotherhood Revelations* is announced, anyway.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

2

Continuing the fight

The rivalry rages as Battlefield 3 and Modern Warfare 3 are set to receive huge DLC updates for more maps and more mayhem

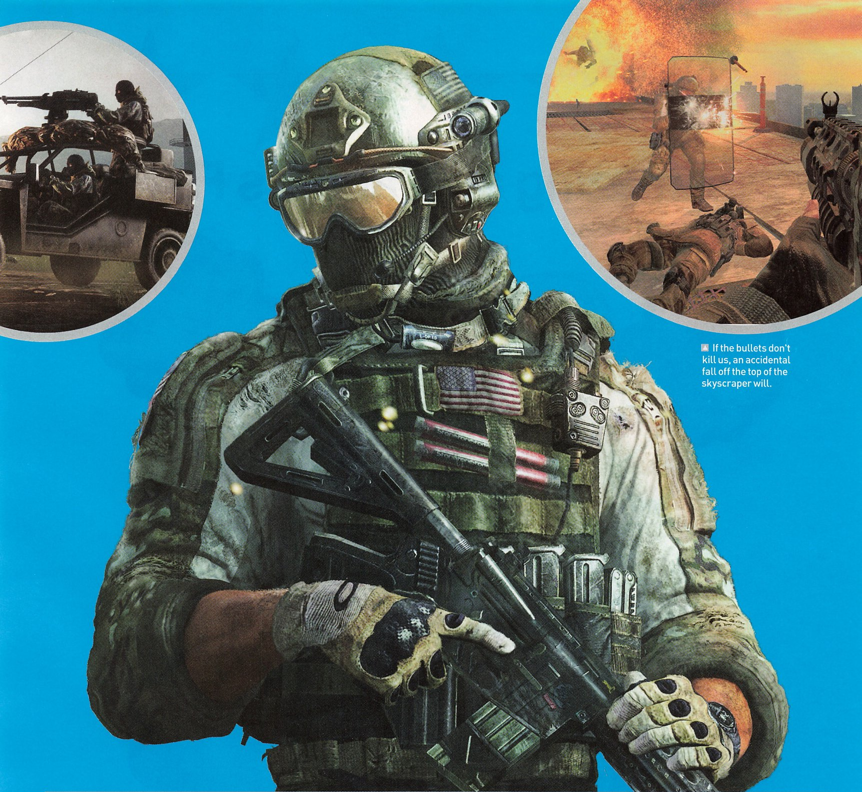
War—what is it good for? In purely virtual terms, the answer is simple: shooting people in the face and insulting them on a deeply personal level. Sometimes we just can't keep our inner troll caged. But after hundreds of hours of deliberately crashing helicopters into control points in *Battlefield 3* or noob-tubing our friends to the brink of tears in *Modern Warfare 3*, we're yearning for a change of scenery.

BATTLEFIELD 3

On the *Battlefield 3* side of things, EA's pumping out three new DLC packs this year in addition to an unprecedented (and *extremely* exciting) feature on consoles: a rent-a-server program. So...what's that mean? Well, server renting is something PC gamers are used to—it allows gamers to pay to rent out a server and host matches as server administrators. Simply put, this means we will be able to customize our server to our liking, including its player limits, which modes and maps are in rotation, and more. Oh, plus we can boot and ban campers and trolls if we want, which is nice. While many gamers will choose to not pony up the cash to rent a server, many hardcore clans will find this a desirable feature.

As for DLC, the first of the three packs is called Close Quarters, which launches in June (a week earlier for PS3 gamers than it does on PC or Xbox 360!). This set introduces 10 new weapons and a slew of new maps—all of which are indoor—that focus on infantry combat. We were promised lots of verticality (read: multiple floors) in each of these new locations. Just be sure to watch out for those auto-shotties. Nothing makes us want to jump off a bridge more than auto-shotties.

The second pack is Armored Kill, which places a heavy emphasis on vehicular combat. Developer DICE even said this DLC will contain the biggest map in *Battlefield* history. So long as we aren't forced to run around for several minutes in a desert before finding a new vehicle, we're down for more tank-on-tank action. Finally, the third DLC pack is called End Game, though EA refused to comment on what it will entail. Our guess? New co-op missions.



▲ If the bullets don't kill us, an accidental fall off the top of the skyscraper will.

MODERN WARFARE 3

Central Park is the scene of many romantic movie moments. It's where Harry met Sally, where Macaulay Culkin shared a tender hug with that hobo woman covered in pigeon crap in *Home Alone 2* and now, with *Modern Warfare 3's* latest DLC, it's the site of a brutal WWIII battle.

Infinity Ward creative strategist Robert Bowling—the man behind *COD's* online vision—offers an insight into *MW3's* first map pack. "Liberation is a typical war-torn location," he tells us. "It ties into the story, because it takes place just after the Battle of New York in Central Park. It's one of our biggest maps. It's very sniper-friendly."

The DLC maps have only recently been made available to PS3 COD Elite members (Activision's paid-for COD subscription service). While non-Elite players will have to wait a bit longer for the latest set of murdery DLC, Bowling is keen to give us the skinny on its most visually exciting maps, including one that's set atop a giant 70-foot skyscraper.

"Overwatch puts you on top of a luxury lounge and penthouse that's under construction, so the floors aren't complete in every area." And as Bowling elaborates, this can be hella dangerous for scatterbrained players. "There are no barriers. You'll see guys who aren't watching what they're doing, and they'll walk straight off the building."

Where the skyscraper-set map is balanced around risk vs. reward (do we try to take sneaky shortcuts over perilously thin beams?) there's also a surprising trip to the seaside. "Piazza is a very serene Italian coastal village," Bowling explains. "It's all about visual variety, while also focusing on close-quarters run-and-gun action."

"★★★★★"

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by Vitsnuklz

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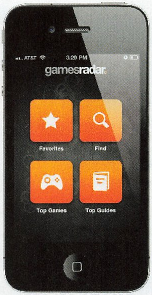
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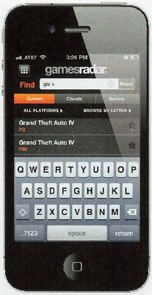
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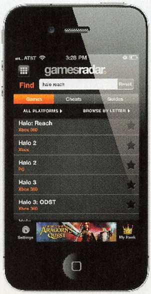
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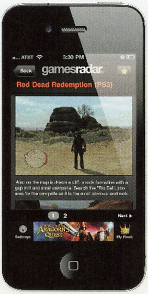
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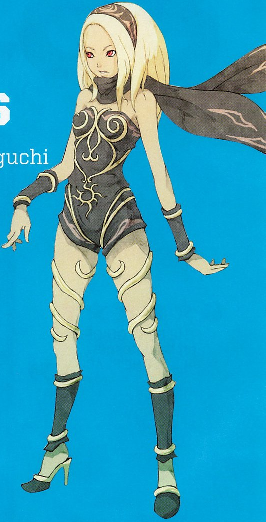
3 Rushing the skies

Gravity Rush devs Keiichiro Toyama and Yoshiaki Yamaguchi discuss Vita's upcoming action adventure game

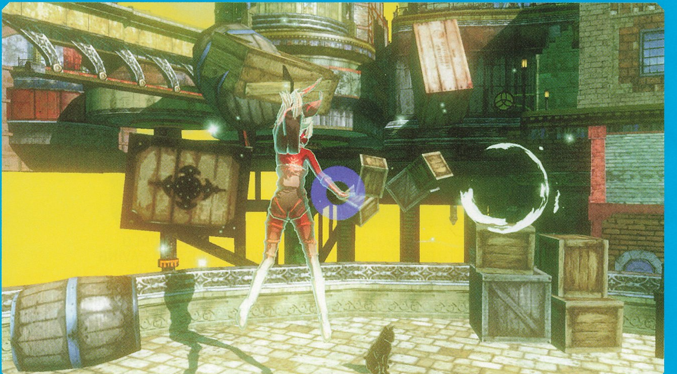


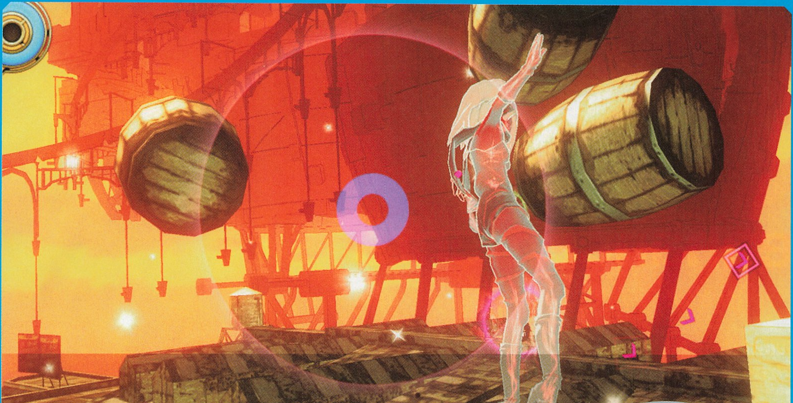
How would you describe *Gravity Rush*?
Toyama: "It's a gravity-based action adventure game, with an openworld setting. It's based on this imaginary world—it's not only big horizontally, but also vertically. The main character, Kat, she receives missions from the people [living in the world], and that's how you progress the story."

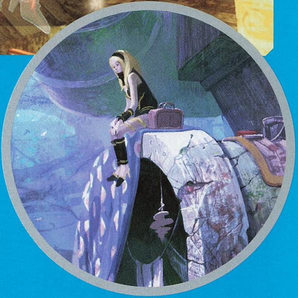
How long is the game? Are there side quests?
Toyama: "This game is a very story driven game—if you focus on the story, about 10 to 13 hours. These days, gamers want games they can play over and over again, like 100 hours. Great movies, they end in two hours. Great games, they need to end, too. *Gravity Rush* doesn't really have side quests...but it has challenge missions. Those are more like kill X enemies in X amount of time, or go through checkpoints as fast as you can—they also have leaderboards, but they're not really related to story progression."

What kind of features can we expect in terms of PS Vita's touchscreen and motion functionality?
Toyama: "What we wanted to utilize the most was the motion sensors. And, by having [dual-analog sticks], we can realize a very natural gameplay style. Marketing actually requested we use the touch feature more in the gameplay, but we wanted to focus on the motion sensors more. So we decided to use the touch feature as a supplemental thing. On the map screen, you can specify where you want to go and use it as a navigator. In the gameplay, you don't use the touchscreen very

Silent Hill creator and *Gravity Rush* creative director Keiichiro Toyama (top) and art director Yoshiaki Yamaguchi (bottom).







much. You can use the motion sensor to control where you want the center of gravity to be, but you can also use the Right-analog stick to adjust, too."

Does Kat get stronger as she completes missions and defeats enemies?
Toyama: "There is a level up system, actually. Instead of experience points, there are items called Precious Gems, purple diamond-looking items scattered throughout the world. You collect those and use them to level up your health, or the lengths at which you control gravity, or how quickly you recover gravity power. You can also unlock different combat skills. Kat learns how to do the gravity kick, or also to have something float in the air and use it as a projectile, and she can also do combos and stuff like that."

***Gravity Rush* has already launched in Japan—how has the game been received?**
Yamaguchi: "People love the characters and the world setting. They're very attached to the characters—they don't want the game to end, so they're playing it very slowly and doing all the challenge missions. They really love the game."

Did you ever toy around with putting *Gravity Rush* on PS3, or was it always planned as a PS Vita game?
Toyama: "Actually, we started out the project as a PS3 title in 2008. Down the line we came across the new Vita hardware. We played around with it and really liked the feelings of the motion sensor. It matches very well with the floating and falling, that sensation. So we switched to Vita, it's a new experience that matches with the game concept."

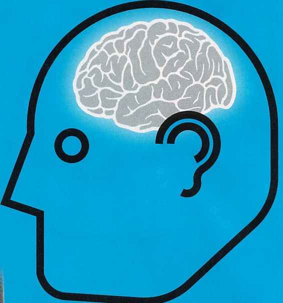
What did you draw your inspiration from for the game's art style and direction?
Toyama: "Mainly from this French artist, Moebius—he's a graphic novel and comic book artist. What's so characteristic about his art is it's very detailed and very vivid in color. Characters in his art and comic books are kind of floating in the air...we got a strong inspiration from his artwork and wanted to create something in the game that characterized floating freely in the world."

What's special about the world in *Gravity Rush*?
Yamaguchi: "There are many games that are horizontally big. There are not many games that are also vertically big. In this game you can literally explore anywhere—there's nowhere that you can't go. By giving you that high level of freedom using the gravity, it's something that's a new experience for gamers. We thought that might be something that would resonate with them."

***Gravity Rush* is a very bright, colorful game. How can color be used to express themes or tell a story?**
Yamaguchi: "We knew we wanted to make [the color of] enemies black. If we [use gravity] to go all the way down to the bottom of the world, it's all dark, almost like a black hole. Black is something in this world that's a symbol of enemies—they come in all different sizes, different shapes. We wanted to make it consistent that all enemies are black in color, and players can easily locate enemies from the air or in town. It's totally different from the color of the world. Depending on the town—there are six or seven towns—and based on the theme, we chose different colors so it's easier for players to understand the emotions behind each scene."

4 Sensory enhancements

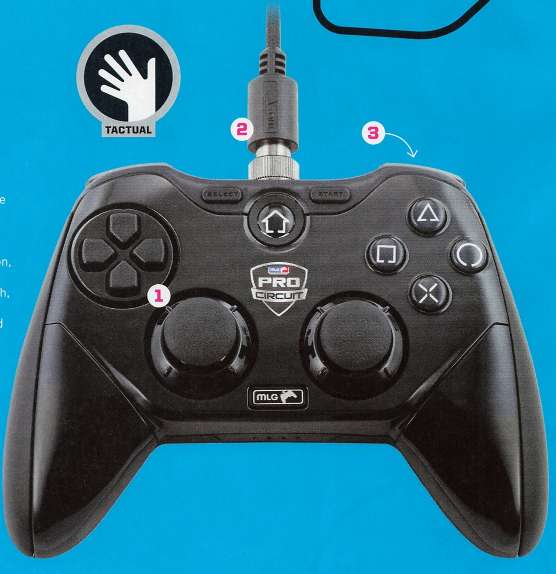
New gear for PS3 that delight the gaming senses

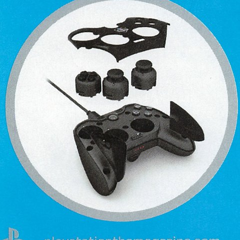


Mad Catz MLG Pro-Circuit Controller

$100 | madcatz.com/mlg/

We love the DualShock, but Mad Catz's MLG Pro-Circuit unit has become our PS3 controller of choice. Developed with input from Major League Gaming's professional players, the Pro-Circuit's modular design addresses every niggling controller complaint we've ever heard. Constructing a controller to our personal specs is as simple as selecting and installing our favorite modules from the array of included components. The materials used and the unit's build quality are topnotch; stick, button, and D-pad inputs always felt precise and positive. The L1/R1 shoulder buttons, though, do make a noticeable clickety-clack sound during use—a bit loud for our taste, but Mad Catz states that pro gamers demand such feedback for tournament conditions. The controller is only available in a wired configuration as the pros want no chance of latency or drop-out issues during play. We're not quite that hardcore in our everyday gaming so we hope Mad Catz considers a wireless version in future.

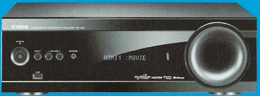


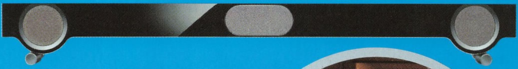


① Robo-controller, activate!
The Pro-Circuit controller takes customization to extremes. Prefer the 360's offset stick config? Always wished for a cross-circle D-pad? Can't stand non-concave thumb pads? A full range of pop-in ProModules allow mixing and matching to exact personal preferences.

② Cable Connect
Wireless isn't an option with the Pro-Circuit, but the three-meter braided ProCable is the nicest wired connection we've encountered. It securely screws into the top of the controller and is also available in optional colors and lengths (sold separately).

③ Reverse Trigger
Love the R2 trigger configuration, but frustrated that many PS3 shooters don't allow the fire command to be remapped from R1? Simply hold down Start and Select on the Pro-Circuit controller for five seconds to automatically invert R1 and R2 functions.





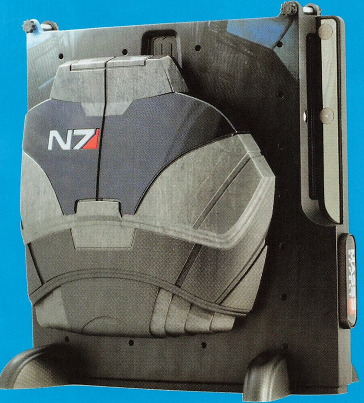
AURAL

Yamaha YHT-S401 Front Surround Home Theater System

$700 | usa.yamaha.com

There's a multitude of audio solutions available to gamers, but we're always looking for something that slots in between the anemic performance of stock TV speakers and the price and complexity of full-on component surround-sound setups. The Yamaha YHT-S401 offers clear, robust sound at a moderate price, but its key attributes are space-saving compactness and simplicity. It took approximately 15 minutes to get the system—composed of a three-speaker soundbar and a receiver with integrated subwoofer—up and running. Although the YHT-S401 offers a wide range of adjustable settings, we found the five preset surround-sound modes (Movie, Music, Sports, TV Program, and Game) satisfied our needs. A sixth "Standard" surround-sound mode is also available for those looking to invest in additional speakers later for a true 5.1-channel experience.

BIG SOUND



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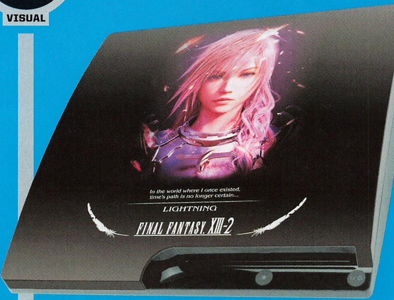

In the world where I once existed,
time's path is no longer certain...
LIGHTNING
FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

Calibur11 Mass Effect 3 Collector's Edition Vault

$90 | calibur11.com

We're not ones for ostentatious displays, but our inner *Mass Effect* fanboy will make an exception for this decorative PS3 Slim casing from Calibur11. Each of the 11,000 limited edition vaults includes a headset/controller cradle and the N7 logo even lights up. While the $90 price might seem steep even to PlayStation fashionistas, it does include the Reinforcement Pack DLC that offers a variety of class, weapons, and item unlocks for *ME3* multiplayer.

Hori Final Fantasy XIII-2 PS3 Face Plate

$20 | horiusa.com

Final Fantasy fans have a more judicious option to display their franchise pride with Hori's PS3 Slim face plate. The snap on console cover does offer a modicum of protection from dust and scratches, but the real reason we'd pick one up is to gaze into Lightning's eyes all day. *Swoon.*

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

5 Fans do it better

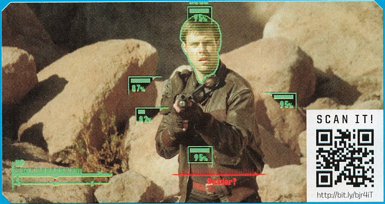
These fan-made videogame movies show we don't need fancy Hollywood studios to be happy

SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/ozg2IE

Portal: No Escape

In 2011 Dan Trachtenberg, host of "The Totally Rad Show," released a stunning fan film titled *Portal: No Escape*. *No Escape* is a seven-minute short introducing an amnesiac trapped in a windowless room until she discovers a certain familiar Handheld Portal Device. This short movie is memorable for its beautifully choreographed escape scene and phenomenal special effects. Sorry, GLaDOS doesn't make an appearance.

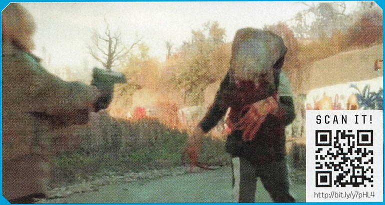


SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/bjr4iT

Fallout: Nuka Break

Fallout: Nuka Break started as a light-hearted 16-minute movie about a tubby, goofy Vault Dweller, a bitter Ghoul, and a former slave as they travel through the Wasteland, fleeing from bounty hunters and searching for the perfect Nuka Cola. The short film's success led to a multi-season web series. Season One concluded in January of this year, but no word yet on when we might see Season Two. Regardless, we love us some *Nuka Break*.

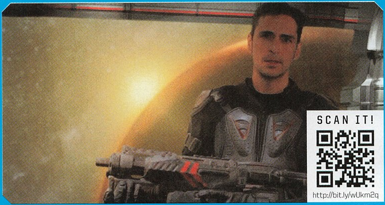


SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/y7pHL4

Escape From City 17 – Part Two

One of the most impressive things we've ever seen from a $500 budget, *Escape From City 17 – Part One* tells the story of a group of Resistance members attempting to flee City 17 before the Combine Citadel explodes, destroying the city and surrounding area. *Part Two*—set during the final events of *Half-Life 2*—is a prequel to the first video and delves deeper into the relationships between the characters while presenting more of *Half-Life's* familiar sights.



SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/wUkm2q

Mass Effect: Red Sand

Created for a student project as a prequel to the games, *Mass Effect: Red Sand* is a yet unreleased fan film starring Mark Meer—the voice of male Shepard—as an Alliance soldier in the *Mass Effect* universe. *Red Sand* is set 35 years before Shepard makes his debut as humans discover ancient technology on Mars left by the Protheans. It's still in production and no release date has been given, but a brief trailer can be found at the movie's website.

6

Fourth time's the charm

Has Skyrim banished the lag dragon forever?

Good news—*Skyrim's* finally running smoothly on PS3, with the recently released 1.4 patch taming the screen-freezing "Rim-lag" reported by many frustrated fans. It's not *quite* that simple, but devs Bethesda issued a handy 1.4 patch guide explaining how to get max performance from the PS3 version—head to http://bit.ly/wTK5pa for more. Best of all, and handily for us, the patch (largely) means we can finally explore *Skyrim* in all its vast, snowy glory without the burning desire to smash our controller to pieces.

What's Rim-lag? A nosediving frame rate suffered during extended *Skyrim* play caused by nebulous technical issues. Here's the kicker: not everyone suffers, and those that do report a whole range of maladies, from complete freezes to uncompletable quests. The finger was firmly pointed at the PS3's reduced RAM. Think of this as a whiteboard. As you play, the game scribbles notes about *everything* you do. It all gets written down and tracked. Trouble is, PS3 has to share half its whiteboard with the GPU, effectively giving it less to work with than the (lag-free) 360 version.

The upshot is that *how* you play is as important as the time you spend doing it. Bethesda's Todd Howard tried to explain the causes: "It's the things you've done, in what order, and what's running. Some of the things are literally 'what spells do you have hot-keyed?' Because they handle memory differently."

Early Signs

In a sad twist, Howard says that his developers knew the problem existed before launch, but didn't think it would affect many people. Bethesda shipped the game on PS3 anyway.

The, ahem, fallout has been bad. Bethesda already suffered similar issues, with Josh Sawyer, an Obsidian developer who worked on *New Vegas*, calling it an "engine level issue." Something Bethesda's VP of PR, Pete Hines disputes, although the symptoms seem identical.

Hope In Sight

There is at least light at the end of the tunnel. The latest 1.4 update seems to fix the issue, citing "long term play optimizations for memory and performance (PS3)" in the patch notes. However v1.2 also made similar promises, but proved temporary. This time, though, it's working. Many players across our Facebook and Twitter channels have confirmed lag is far less problematic than it had been, and most have reported crash-free gaming sessions.

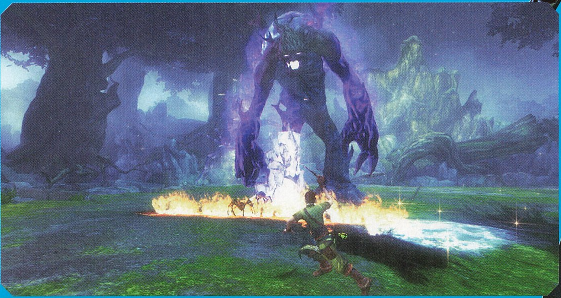
Patch notes across formats hint that errant scripting has been addressed. (*New Vegas'* glitches were patched with a fix addressing over 200 scripting issues.) Now, however, Bethesda is talking about *Skyrim* DLC, and it's worth noting the *New Vegas* DLC on 360 saw numerous issues introduced, including corrupted saves and freezing—leading doomsayers to suggest *Skyrim*'s fixed for now, but that could all change. In reality, given the history, we find it extremely unlikely Bethesda would want to reinstate problems for *fun*. Odder still, we know many players who never experienced "Rim-lag" at all.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

7 Signs of Movement

PS Move games that aren't going through the motions



Sorcery ETA **May** Pub **SCEA** Dev **The Workshop**

Sorcery was the most anticipated PS Move game coming out of the motion control system's E3 2010 launch announcement. The notion of a wizard adventure utilizing the Move's wand-like controller seemed a natural combination, but it's taken nearly two years for the game to magically appear. The good news is that our hands-on demo suggests that the time was well spent as *Sorcery* exhibits some of the most fluid and intuitive Move control we've yet experienced. The Nav controller is required to guide our hero Finn through the game world, but most every other action is initiated via the Wand controller. A wide variety of elemental spells are available to cast and combining, say, fire with a wind-based tornado creates new attacks like a flaming cyclone. Deft flicks of the Wand can also initiate curved and arced spell shots with uncanny precision.

Sony Entertainment Network

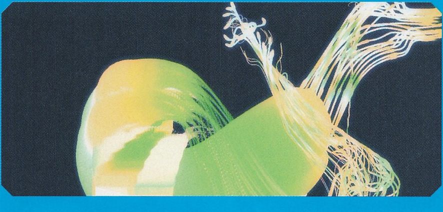
8 Say hello to SEN

PSN transistions to Sony Entertainment Network

We suck with names. Seriously, it's taken 10 years to adjust to our favorite brand of mano-a-mano suplexing being called WWE after those panda-huggers wrestled the word "Federation" away from Vinnie Mac in 2002. Now Sony has decided to go the name change route, too, with your PSN account being switched to an SEN one. That's Sony Entertainment Network, acronym haters.

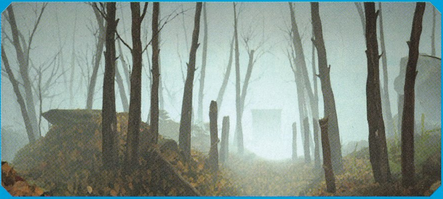
Name Game

You've almost certainly noticed, and likely been left confused, so we'll clarify. PSN's name switcheroo only affects user accounts, rather than the entire online service as a whole. "It's just an account name change and will be called SEN from now on," according to a Sony rep. "This should make it clearer and easier for people to associate the service with all Sony products and have one logon." Your



PixelJunk 4am ETA **Spring** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Q-Games**

Consider *PixelJunk 4am* a visual music creator rather than a videogame. Art and music director Baiyon equates the experience to a late-night DJing session. Only the Wand controller is used in *4am* to access a wide range of audio effects and visualizer styles, with the sound further manipulated with gestures. Perhaps the most intriguing feature is the ability to broadcast live performances on PSN. Even those who don't own *4am* can tune into presentations by downloading a free viewer application. We'll be sure to put on a show once arrhythmic pile-driver bashing becomes a popular music genre. Maybe we'll call it Flubstep.



Datura ETA **Spring** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Plastic**

Developer Plastic's 2008 PSN title, *Linger in Shadows*, has alternatively been described as a tech demo, an experience, or art. The forthcoming *Datura* seems to employ more conventional game elements, but the overall structure is still more about exploration, experimentation, and discovery than completing objectives. Think of it as a modern day reinterpretation of point-and-click adventures like *Myst*. For most of our brief hands-on time, we used the Move controller to control a disembodied hand to interact with items we discovered while walking through a mysterious forest. Experiences ranged from throwing a potato at a sleeping pig to carnival-game target shooting to pick-axing ice to free a woman trapped beneath a frozen lake. *Datura* is definitely strange, but seems oddly compelling.

existing PSN login details aren't affected by the change.

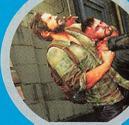
All you have to do is agree to the terms and conditions when you download firmware 4.11 and your account details will automatically be migrated over to the new service. Rest assured the switch to SEN accounts will change very little for PS3 and Vita gamers. The move is essentially just a piece of housekeeping on Sony's part, moving its online PlayStation business closer to its other account services such as Music Unlimited, Video Unlimited, and PlayMemories Online. So if you already use any of these products, the move makes it easier to access them with your PSN login—at the same time removing the old problem of using different variations of the same word as separate passwords. "Hmm, was it Krato5, Krat0s or kR8os? Arrgh!"

9

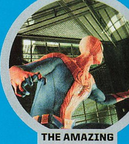
The Readers' Most Wanted

Looks like *Black Ops 2* and *Grand Theft Auto V* retain the number one and two positions respectively this month. Anyone willing to bet *Black Ops 2* sticks around in the top spot until it releases? *Modern Warfare 3* pretty much did. We've also got some surprising change ups: *Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6: Patriots* has disappeared entirely from the list, replaced by the recently announced *Assassin's Creed III* and *The Amazing Spider-Man.*

01 *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*
02 *Grand Theft Auto V*
03 *Assassin's Creed III*
04 *Resident Evil 6*
05 *Madden NFL 13*
06 *DmC: Devil May Cry*
07 *BioShock Infinite*
08 *Max Payne 3*
09 *The Amazing Spider-Man*
10 *Borderlands 2*
11 *The Last of Us*
12 *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron*
13 *Prototype 2*
14 *Battleship*
15 *Men in Black*
16 *Persona 4 Arena*
17 *Star Trek: The Game*
18 *DarkSiders II*
19 *Let's Dance with Mel B*
20 *Spec Ops: The Line*
20 *Risen 2: Dark Waters*



THE LAST OF US



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was February 19, 2012 to March 3, 2012.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Is Day One DLC a rip-off for consumers?

PTOM eds wrangle over the notion of "bonus" content

Yes
Says consumer watchdog
Roger Burchill

Publishers, could you at least *pretend* like you're giving us a good deal? When EA announced *Mass Effect 3* would launch alongside some day one, for-pay DLC, they claimed the DLC had been developed and completed separately despite the coinciding release date. However, hackers quickly discovered that much of the content was actually *already on the disc*. That's not an "extra"—that's intentionally omitted content.

And we're not talking about alternate costumes or weapon packs. We're talking about a playable character—the first from his particular race in the *Mass Effect* universe—whose story ties directly into the campaign. Even if it's true that "From Ashes" wasn't finished until after the rest of the game, the significance of this content still makes us feel cheated.

Mass Effect, of course, isn't the only recent offender here. *Street Fighter X Tekken* displays DLC fighters on the character select screen right out of the box—but won't actually let us select them until we pay up. It's bad enough we have to mull over the decision whether the DLC seems worth it. Do we really need a constant reminder of what's missing if we choose to opt out on the DLC?

Maybe if publishers just waited a few weeks to release this stuff we'd feel slightly less offended by the obvious money grab. Or maybe they could just include all the content with the game like the good ol' days when we didn't have to purchase our fun a la carte.

No
Says content consumer
Anne Lewis

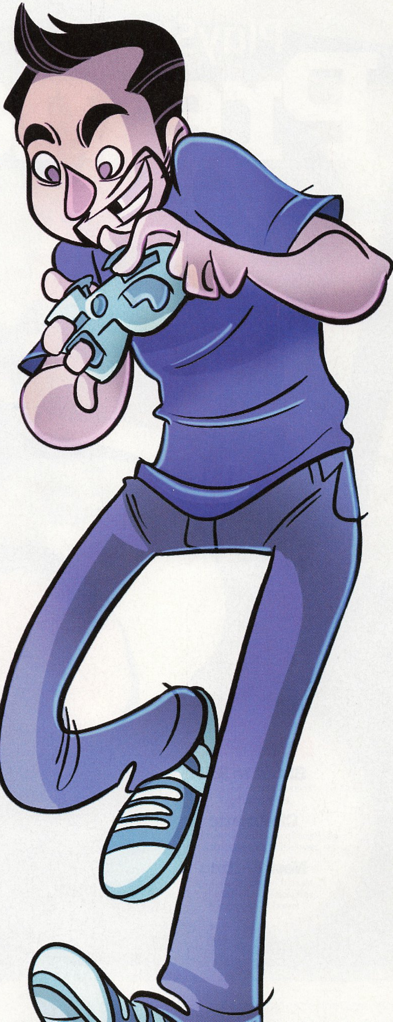
It's a tale as old as time: A game comes out, I have my fun with it, and as soon as the end is in sight, panic sets in. What will my life be like after this? What will I do with my free time? Why does everything I love leave me? Okay, that last one has nothing to do with games, but the point stands. It's in this period of mourning that I desperately desire DLC. Even if I weren't buying the *Mass Effect 3* Collector's Edition (which comes packaged with "From Ashes"), I would still happily drop extra cash for day one DLC to delay my suffering just a little longer.

I think a lot of the anguish over first day DLC ties into why people have problems with online passes. Many times this DLC forces players to pre-order or buy games new rather than buy used or borrow from a friend. *Batman: Arkham City* had the Catwoman DLC that only came with a new copy. *Battlefield 3* had "Back to Karkand," which was only available for pre-orders unless you bought it separately.

I understand why people would be upset about having to spend extra money on DLC the day a game drops, but just don't buy it right away if it makes you feel better. Let the options simmer for a while. *ME3* is a long game, and players have plenty of time to consider their decision before inevitably dropping 10 bucks on the DLC.

You might know **Joshua**. He loves video games, and he owns enough to know they're not all meant for kids. That's why he reminds his friends (at least the ones that have kids) that they all have **big black letters on the box** to help parents find the ones that are best for their families.

You can learn about those ratings at **ESRB.org**



Los Angeles, CA

ESRB
ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE
RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Previews

Quick Pitch

Shoot to Kill
Enemies react to the impact of every single bullet.

Cinematic
Max Payne 3 progresses narrative through a new motion-comic presentation.

New Setting
Max is done with New York and has relocated to São Paulo, Brazil to work as a bodyguard.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **Rockstar Games** Dev **Rockstar Vancouver**

Max Payne 3

Gangs, conspiracy, and a cop who doesn't play by the rules

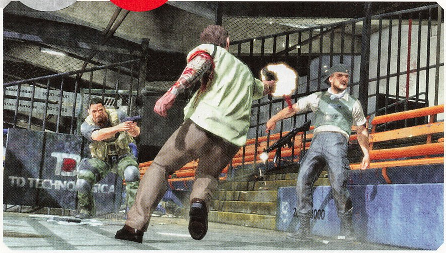
It's been eight years since we last saw our favorite nihilistic cop shoot bad guys in slo-mo and perform chilling monologues about the American dream. Those eight years haven't exactly been kind to Max Payne (the character)—he's left the cold streets of New York behind, finding himself in São Paulo, Brazil, working as a bodyguard for an extremely wealthy family. The new Max, an aged Max, also has a tendency to hit the sauce rather fiercely considering, you know, everyone he's ever loved was brutally murdered. Conversely, those same eight years *have* been kind to *Max Payne* (the series).

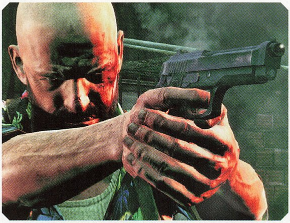
Developed by Rockstar (as opposed to Remedy Entertainment, the developer of the first two games), *Max Payne 3* doesn't aim to reinvent the franchise with new tricks or gimmicks. Instead, Rockstar's focus lies solely in creating the most refined third-person shooter we've ever seen. The gunplay feels just as slick and clean as it used to, with a few minor tweaks. Enemies now grimace and jerk realistically to the impact of every single bullet, and no two bad guys ever go down the same. It's a small change, sure, but it adds a huge amount of depth to the shooter experience. Of course, bullet time remains an integral part of *Max Payne 3*, and we frequently used it to barge into rooms full of thugs headfirst with guns drawn.

In fact, many traditional *Max Payne* elements remain intact. Max's health is still represented by a silhouette of his body—take too much damage and he'll munch some painkillers. We took a *lot* of bullets during our hands-on session and were quickly introduced to a new feature called Last Man Standing. Here, time slows when Max takes a fatal shot, and our targeting reticle slowly drifts toward the enemy who fired the bullet. If we can kill him before our vision fades, we get a reprieve from death at the expense of a pain pill.

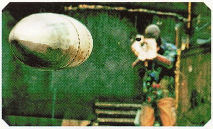
Max Payne 3's new cover system also became instrumental in our survival. Sticking in and out of cover is easily done with the press of a button, providing much-needed protection from the endless onslaught of enemy fire. It's a nice addition that doesn't detract from the fast-paced running and gunning we're accustomed to.

What impressed us most about *Max Payne 3*, though, was the small stuff. ▸▸





There are no loading screens in *Max Payne 3*. Instead, in-game cutscenes act as level transitions.



Max likes to be dramatic—he only picks up new weapons while performing impressive somersaults over top of them.

When we dove to the floor, Max braced himself for impact. Upon landing, we had complete 360-degree control on the ground, and could reposition to take out any additional bad guys before getting back on our feet. Max is always aware of his surroundings and uses contextual animations, similar to Nathan Drake's tendency to press his hand against nearby walls or shift his weight into cover.

Only one new change threw us off. Gone are the traditional static graphic novel panes from the previous *Max Payne* titles. Instead, *Max Payne 3* employs a motion-comic vibe, blending regular in-game footage, text, and Max's iconic monologue all at once. It's a bit jarring and is undoubtedly the most noticeable departure from *Max Payne* tradition, but it adds a new flavor that we just might come to appreciate.

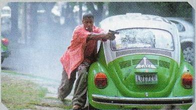
Of course, bullet time remains an integral part of *Max Payne 3*.

Max Payne 3 will undoubtedly be one hell of a third-person shooter, but we hope topnotch action doesn't come at the expense of the narrative build-up and suspense that created an excellent sense of pacing in the previous games. If our brief taste of the game is any indication, though, Max is in very capable hands. RYAN TALJONICK

Lights, Camera, Action Get ready for Max mayhem with these action gems

Will *Max Payne 3* be the greatest third-person shooter ever? Maybe—but our hands-on taste had us itching for some shoot-'em-up action, so we turned to the next best thing: our favorite action flicks. Got an itchy finger trigger? Here are three films that provide hours of guns-blazin' glory.

Die Hard The world has unanimously voted *Die Hard* as the greatest action flick ever.



Man on Fire Think *Max Payne 3's* plot, except Denzel Washington plays a former assassin.

The Matrix Okay, so this one's heavy on the sci-fi, but come on—it's got bullet time!

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Hong Kong's underworld serves as the stage for *Sleeping Dogs*' crime drama.

Quick Pitch

Hardboiled
A gritty, character-driven crime drama set in Hong Kong.

Fast Feet
Martial arts-fueled action guarantees plenty of bones will be broken..

Triple Threat
Drive, fight, and shoot in over-the-top, cinematic style.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **United Front Games**

Sleeping Dogs

An openworld game with bite

As much as we dig the do-what-you-want freedom afforded by openworld games, the genre generally fails to deliver the polished mechanics of dedicated shooting, fighting, and racing experiences. Even *Grand Theft Auto*, the consistently-praised granddaddy of the genre, has always struggled to offer gunplay that can compete with its more focused contemporaries. This is precisely why our skeptical ears perked like a playful puppy's when United Front Games executive producer, Stephen Van Der Mescht, addressed this very issue before demoing *Sleeping Dogs*. "What we've tried to do is really focus in on the core mechanics—the combat, the shooting, and the driving—and make them the best in class; you can actually take these mechanics and put them against linear games and have the same quality experience."

Eager to prove his point, Van Der Mescht allowed us to get behind a gamepad and put *Sleeping Dog's* martial arts-driven combat through its paces. Heavily inspired by Hong Kong action movie heroes, undercover cop protagonist Wei Shen is as proficient with his feet and fists as he is a pistol or shotgun. Outnumbered by an aggressive group of street thugs, we quickly got comfortable controlling the combo- and counter-fueled fisticuffs; directed by a blend of light and heavy attacks, grapples and disarms, the combat soon revealed a satisfying rhythm reminiscent of *Batman: Arkham City's*. Aided by responsive facebutton inputs, we effortlessly strung attacks into a graceful ballet of broken bones and ejected teeth.

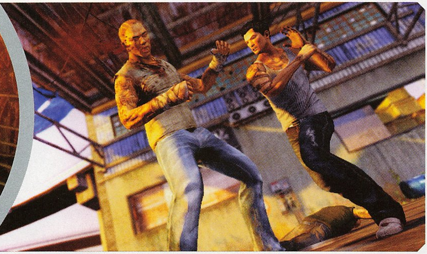
Visceral Vice

While we conducted the action, animations and audio cues did their part to immerse us in the brutal street violence; we actually winced the first time Shen forcefully introduced his foot to a downed foe's leg—last time we heard a crack like that, a Louisville Slugger was making contact with a fastball. Fracturing femurs is only part of what makes the combat so brutal though; the real hook is *Sleeping Dog's* context-specific finishing moves. Upon dragging stunned enemies toward glowing environmental objects, such as ventilation fans, car doors, air ducts, and suspended engine blocks, we can—with a tap of the Triangle button—ensure the targets don't get back up.

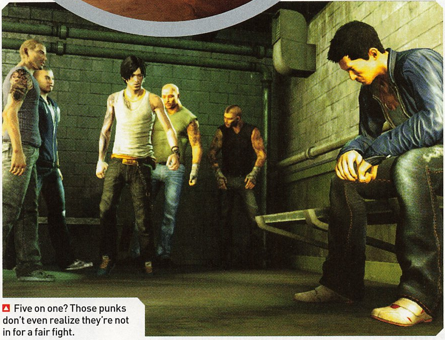
On top of being an effective way to put victims in comas—if not body bags—these brawl-ending finishers yield the sort of animations that will surely earn the game a Mature rating; we won't soon forget the first time we fed a dude's face into a tablesaw or

Same Game New Name

Originally titled *True Crime: Hong Kong*, *Sleeping Dogs* was supposed to be the next sequel in Activision's long-dormant, Luxoflux-developed openworld action franchise. When the *Call of Duty* publisher decided to drop the title though, Square Enix picked it up and gave it the unquestionably cooler name. Despite its early ties to the *True Crime* series, United Front Games—the title's developer from day one—maintains they've always treated it as an original IP.



The final game promises a variety of RPG-flavored elements, as we can upgrade Wei Shen's abilities and customize his look.



Five on one? Those punks don't even realize they're not in for a fair fight.

We won't soon forget the first time we fed a dude's face into a tablesaw.

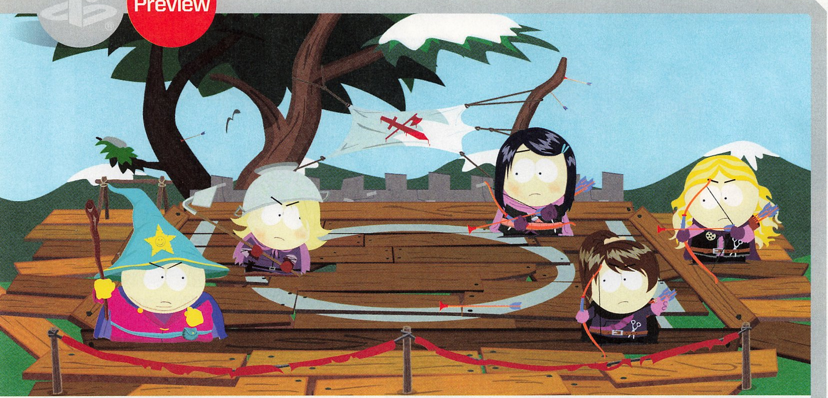
repeatedly slammed a chump's skull with a refrigerator door. The varied asskicking is further supported by Shen's ability to strip baddies of their weapons. This can mean a range of offensive manuevers such as relieving a foe of his firearm before unloading its clip into his friends' chests, or planting a meat cleaver into the skull of the guy who was swinging the same steel at Shen seconds earlier.

Drive Time

Convinced we'd be doing more than spamming generic attacks during *Sleeping Dogs'* brutal melees, it was time to put the pedal to the metal. The final game promises both land and sea high-speed chases and side-mission races, but we only experienced the latter from behind the wheel of a sports car. Supported by familiar controls—accelerate with R2, brake with R1—the driving is pretty much what we expected from the *ModNation Racers* developer; handling feels arcadey without being too forgiving, and a satisfying sense of speed supports the title's action-movie vibe. While we only experienced the most basic rubber-burning mechanics, the game also supports "action hijacks"—the ability to jump from one moving vehicle to another, as well as simultaneous driving and shooting.

Speaking of filling fools full of lead, our demo sadly did not allow us to flex our trigger fingers. That said, we were shown what looks to be a promising take on littering an expansive landscape with expended shells and bleeding-out bodies. In addition to the basic running-and-gunning that defines most open-world games' gunplay, *Sleeping Dogs* features a cover system, a slo-mo ability, and a cinematic vault-and-shoot move we especially look forward to pulling off.

If the gunplay can match what we experienced behind the wheel and Shen's lethal limbs, and the story can deliver its promise of a gripping yarn involving Shen's infiltration of the Triads, then we can't wait to wake *Sleeping Dogs*. **MATT CABRAL**



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Winter** Pub **THQ** Dev **Obsidian Entertainment**

South Park The Game

How do you calculate hit points for Christmas poo and pinkeye?

Imagine if your favorite mag on the planet told you that a *South Park* game is coming to PS3. And that it's an RPG. Made by the developer behind *Alpha Protocol*, and built upon the *Dungeon Siege III* engine. You'd laugh. Then cry. Then torch said magazine for printing something so absurd. Except, well, it's kind of true.

To give *South Park* dev Obsidian its due, it also made the good-but-not-great *Fallout: New Vegas*. But while that roleplayer had its humorous moments, it wasn't exactly the laugh-a-thon expected from *South Park*—which is where creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker come in. They're penning the game's script and supplying character voices for all your favorites. So: jokes are in! The problem is, people don't play games solely for jokes.

Don't Kick the Baby

Gameplay is vital, and it needs to consist of more than mindless missions and funny cutscenes. As a result, RPG elements are used to place the *South Park* kids in unconventional situations: critical hits, experience points, and consumables are all in, as are character classes like, um, Jew—described by lead designer Matt MacLean as "high-risk/high-reward." More like "deliberately controversial."

Still, Stone and Parker's involvement isn't just a token thing—they know what fans want. Like added violence. "[We] want the kids to bleed more," was their reaction to an early look at the game. That part sounds promising. But *Alpha Protocol*? And the shadow of that dreadful *South Park* shooter on PSone looming? This is might need a minor miracle if it's to avoid the same fate as Mecha-Streisand. JAMES COATES

Obvious Cast List

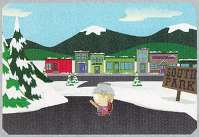
Eric

Kyle

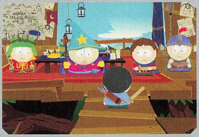
Stan

The Hook Tradition reigns as Cartman complains

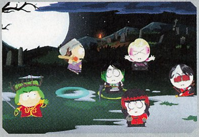
The very notion of a *South Park* RPG causes us to pull our best screw-you-hippy faces, but it's gameplay, not gags, that will be vital. The focus on character classes, combat (which is turn-based), and a summoning system sets this apart from other licensed titles. Like Mr. Hankey, it's doing its utmost to be unique.



With gameplay like this, who needs *Skyrim*?



You need to befriend these dudes. Even Eric.

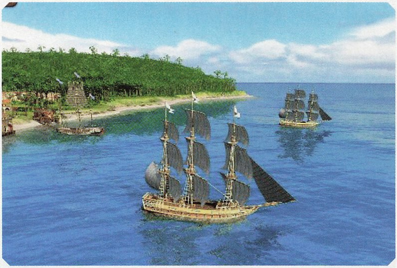


"You do a Thriller dance, I'll switch off the PS3."

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **April** Pub **Kalypso Media** Dev **Kalypso Media**

Port Royale 3

The *COD* of 17th century boat sims



We know the world is eager to get a taste of exciting 17th century economic trends.

What, you've never heard of it? It's time for landlubbers to brush up on their historical ship adventures with lines in economic simulation and trade.

The third in a series of action strategies made popular on PC, *Port Royale 3* is set in the turquoise waters of the 17th century Caribbean. But forget about a *Mass Effect 3*-style trilogy capping denouement: this is a business sim, not a seafaring sensation (unless you get emotional about the mercantile system).

That's not to say there isn't gunpowder and plot to hoist your proverbial mainsail: sieges, raids, and naval battles add watery peril to the otherwise dry tone, and as in landlocked strategies like *Empire: Total War* and *The Settlers*, there's more than one way to take power. Pirates fight for it, merchants trade for it, and adventurers seek it out. Our in-game actions build notoriety among the pineapple-eating population as we build facilities and establish trade routes, all under (we're told) a tight and realistic economic framework.

While Kalypso hasn't given up much more than the words "competitive multiplayer" so far, there is the potential for players to contest via commerce or force over PSN. We doubt gamers will ditch *COD*'s online warzones for *Port Royale 3* but it's nice to have a non-shooter option. **JAMES COATES**

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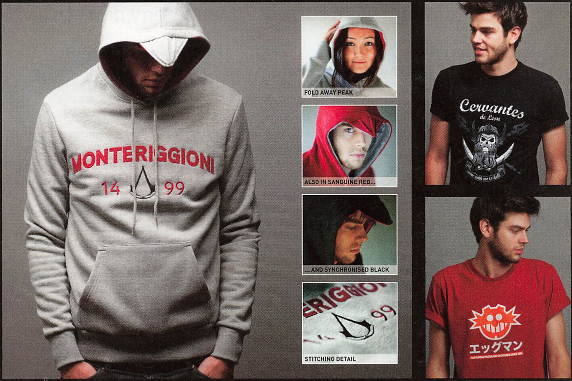

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Graeme Boyd, Xbox

WORLDWIDE DELIVERY!

Quick Pitch

Brains and Brawn
Utilize strong muscles and a sharp mind to save Earth from aggressive alien attackers.

Toy Soldiers
Upgrade and customize an army of badasses before unleashing them in battles.

Consequences
Decisions made at HQ play out on the battlefield.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Firaxis Games**

XCOM Enemy Unknown

Who says turn-based strategy can't be fun?

Real Men Don't Respawn

Those who think "taking turns" is only for snobby PC players afraid of dirtying their hands, consider this: When an *XCOM* soldier is killed in action, he's not coming back for a do-over. Solomon elaborates on this hardcore concept: "We wanted there to be real, permanent consequences...you can lose a soldier, you can lose a country, you can lose *XCOM*; it gets players invested when they realize the stakes are real." Ouch!

For many console gamers, the thought of playing a turn-based strategy game is hardly more appealing than passing a kidney stone. Primarily the domain of the mouse-and-keyboard crowd, the genre hasn't caught on much with those who prefer fighting on *Call of Duty's* frontlines. Led by strategy game legend Sid Meier, Firaxis Games' *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* aims to please their existing audience and open the genre to newcomers.

At first glance, the turn-based tactical title looks like another save-the-world-from-aliens shooter. Its visuals, which walk the line between realistic and stylized, are a far cry from the grid-covered, menu-driven presentations that once defined strategy games. Whether witnessing a gas station blow up or facing a hulking, clawed Berserker, no one will mistake *Enemy Unknown* for a title that sacrifices style for substance.

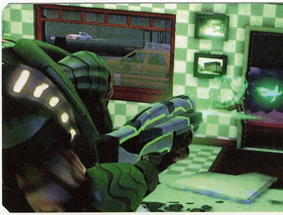
Change of Pace

Of course, Firaxis' real challenge lies in convincing unseasoned strategists that managing resources can be as much fun as pumping buckshot into evil-doers' faces. Players who gauge a game's quality by the size of the callous on their trigger fingers will no doubt have to warm up to *Enemy Unknown's* pacing. During our demo, for example, a four-man squad of XCOM soldiers took several minutes to do what an average FPS space marine does in seconds. The result—decimated environments, expended shell casings, and alien corpses aplenty—is the same, but the thoughtful execution is what makes *Enemy Unknown* special.

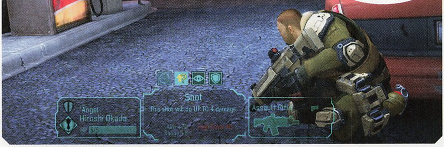
For lead designer Jake Solomon, putting a fresh spin on a familiar concept is what will draw players of all stripes to *Enemy Unknown's* brawn-and-brains gameplay. "I think we can honestly say, 'Trust me, you have not played a game like this. We have all the things you like to do... soldiers killing aliens, RPG elements where you're leveling up and customizing soldiers... we're just presenting it in a completely different way.' On top of all that, we have this strategy layer where players are making decisions they normally don't make in other games."

Solomon also squashes any concerns PS3 owners might have about playing a re-imagining of a nearly 20-year-old PC title with a DualShock. "In terms of actual inputs, it's pretty straightforward; you move the soldier, then you choose the ability that you want that solider to do and choose targets. It hasn't been difficult to map to a gamepad." Between our promising look at *Enemy Unknown* and Firaxis' strategy game background, we're betting the turn-based genre's about to make some new friends.

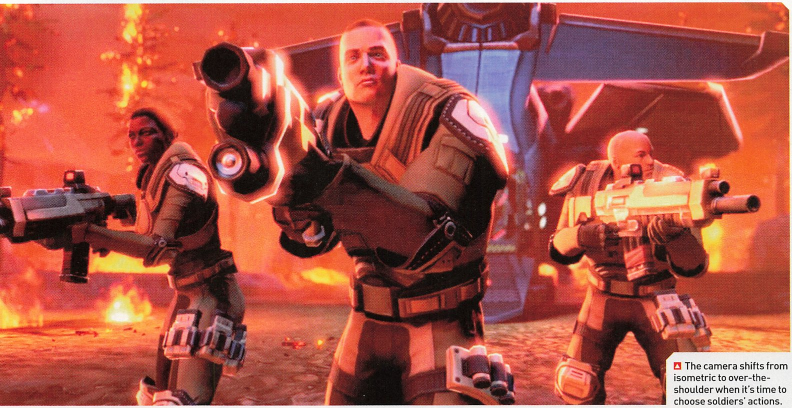
MATT CABRAL



Expect destructible environments and slick special effects.


RB
36%
DRINKS
Angel
Hiroshi Okada
HP
Shot
This shot will do UP TO 4 damage
Assault Rifle

Enemy Unknown's extraterrestrial menaces come in all shapes and sizes, but they all share a common goal: destroy humanity.



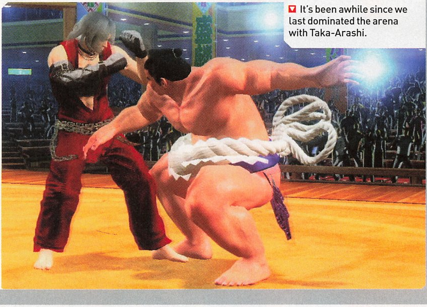
The camera shifts from isometric to over-the-shoulder when it's time to choose soldiers' actions.

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

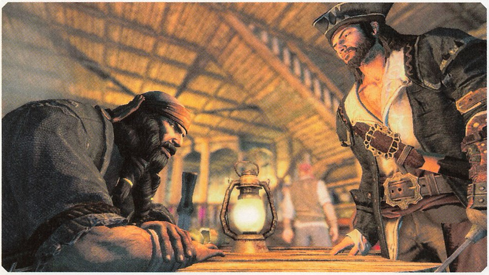
Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown

Back in the fight

Five years after the original PS3 retail release, *Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown* delivers a tweaked version of Sega's fighting series to PSN. Two fresh faces—sumo wrestler Taka-Arashi from *VF3* and newcomer Jean Kujo, a French karate master—have been added to round out *Showdown's 19* fighter roster, while stages are augmented with interactive elements like walls and fences. New single-player and online modes round out the enhancements. **ANDREW HAYWARD**



It's been awhile since we last dominated the arena with Taka-Arashi.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Q4** Pub **Topware Interactive** Dev **Octane Games**

Raven's Cry

Sailing into deadly waters

Eschewing the Disney view of pirates in favor of a grimmer, more historically accurate tale, *Raven's Cry*—a dark, third-person adventure—forces us to experience the emotional turmoil of its lead character Christopher Raven. Plagued by a gruesome past that left him sans family and a hook for a hand, Raven seeks retribution against Neville Scranton, the pirate who took everything from him. Throughout the game we experience the internal struggle our dark hero faces as he commits the

▲ Punch, kick, it's all in the mind. And also in the fists and feet of our fave ninja Ryu Hayabusa.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **September** Pub **Temco Koei** Dev **Team Ninja**

Dead or Alive 5

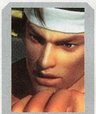
Alive and kicking

Team Ninja doesn't just want to churn out another dollop of top-heavy fighting with *Dead or Alive's* first outing on PS3—producer Yosuke Hayashi has high ambitions, and they don't involve outsized mammary glands. The new concept? It's called "fighting entertainment."

Okay, on paper that sounds more vague than a presidential candidate's campaign promises, but after a few seconds of playing *DOA5* it makes perfect sense—although the beat-'em-up core remains intact, the game is now basically an action movie, complete with cliffhanger moments. In our first two minutes of being let loose on the game, we made such a mess of the environment that the whole level was on a slant. That poses a few tactical chin-scratchers, like "Oh God, I'm falling off the world!" That's right, when we said cliffhanger moments, it was meant literally. In a similar style to *Soulcalibur's* Ring Outs, we can be flung—or, preferably, fling others—clean off a stage. Of course, chunks of the environment can also be used as landing pads for the opponents we launch into the air. Nothing beats punching a friend so hard they fly into a car and cause it to explode.

Controls have been tweaked to create more show-stopping moments—hold down R2, for example, to unleash a Power Blow, a slo-mo cinematic combo that lets us aim where we want to chuck our opponent. *DOA5* isn't the deepest fighter, and it isn't going to take the pro circuit by storm, but what it does do is bring Hollywood-style destruction to each fight. Basically, this is *Dead or Alive* meets John Woo. Works for us.

JAMES COATES



Star Power

Fancy yourself a fan of fighting game cameos? For the first time ever, *DOA* has opened its roster to non-franchise characters with the inclusion of *Virtua Fighter's* Akira Yuki.

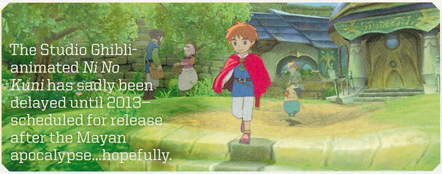
same atrocities as the monster he pursues. Much like real life, Raven must often choose between two unsavory options to further his search for his family's killer, and these morally gray decisions could come back to either help or haunt us.

Sword and hook will be our main weapons in combat. Guns are an option, but should not be relied upon due to their slow reload speed. Rather, they should be treated like grenades—used only when the situation seems dire and we need to thin the herd from afar. We'll also have access to Charms, which are *Raven's Cry's* version of magical spells. These, too, have a slow recharge rate and are intended as a last recourse.

We often hear: "While seeking revenge, dig two graves—one for yourself." Christopher Raven is going to need to dig a hell of a lot more than two. **ANNE LEWIS**

Where the hell is...

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch (NAMCO BANDAI)



The Studio Ghibli-animated *Ni No Kuni* has sadly been delayed until 2013—scheduled for release after the Mayan apocalypse...hopefully.

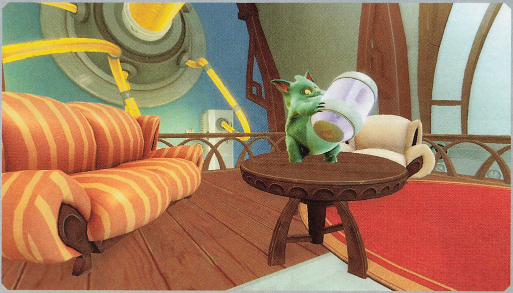
The latest on...

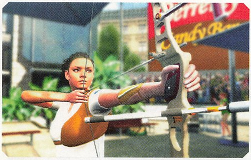
New shots, new games, new info

Quantum Conundrum

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Airtight Games**

After mad inventor Professor Fitz Quadwrangle goes missing, it's up to his nephew to figure out what happened. With the help of the Professor's Interdimensional Shift Device we can alter the dimension around us to manipulate environments, solve puzzles, and explore the enormous Quadwrangle mansion. *Quantum Conundrum* is a first-person puzzle game designed by Kim Swift, the co-creator of *Portal*, and allows us to switch dimensions on the fly. Enter the "Fluffy" dimension to make heavy items weigh as much as a teddy bear or use "Slow-mo" to slow the surrounding environment.

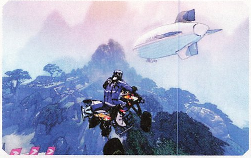




Summer Stars 2012

Format **PS3** ETA **June** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **49 Games**

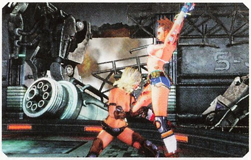
Summer Stars 2012 presents us the opportunity to be professional athletes from the relative safety of our living room. The hardest part, we imagine, will be not stumbling into our lamp while attempting the Triple Jump.



Mad Riders

Format **PSN** ETA **Q2** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Techland**

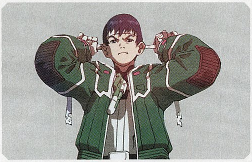
The off-road arcade racer formally known as *Project Haste* is coming to PSN this spring. *Mad Riders* boasts over 45 tracks set across the world and three multiplayer modes. Be prepared to get your trick on.



Girl Fight

Format **PSN** ETA **Q2** Pub **Majesco** Dev **Kung Fu Factory**

So, this is a fighting game that exists. Rather, it's in the process of existing. Our first reaction to *Girl Fight* was "Come on. Really?" Then we thought about oiled-up ladies punching the crap out of each other and got over it pretty quickly.



Zone of the Enders HD Collection

Format PS3 **ETA** Fall **Pub** Konami **Dev** Kojima Productions

Zone of the Enders and *Zone of the Enders: 2nd Runner* have been re-mastered and re-beautified in preparation for a PS3 launch. Fans will certainly appreciate the series getting the HD treatment after waiting for so long.

Unchained Blades

Format PSP **ETA** TBD **Pub** XSEED Games **Dev** FuRyu

Known as *UnchainBlades ReXX* in Japan, *Unchained Blades* comes from the team that created the *Lunar* and *Grandia* games. The beautiful, narrative-driven, first-person dungeon crawler uses numerous famous manga artists to achieve its distinctive look.

Dyad

Format PSN **ETA** TBD **Pub** Independent **Dev**][

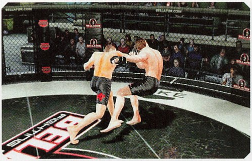
Dyad is an abstract racer in the same way *Child of Eden* is an abstract shooter. Trippy visuals and a beautiful soundtrack provide ambiance as we race through levels, strategically interacting with enemies to gain speed and "win" the race.

BlueTeam 0
RedTeam 0

Wheels of Destruction: World Tour

Format PSN **ETA** TBD **Pub** Gelid Games **Dev** Gelid Games

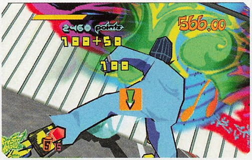
We can't even count the number of times we've been driving and just wanted to destroy every other car on the road. That's the premise of *Wheels of Destruction*—post-apocalyptic car combat for the wrathful soul.



Bellator: MMA Onslaught

Format PSN **ETA** TBD **Pub** 345 Games **Dev** 345 Games

Founded in 2008, Bellator Fighting Championships is currently the second largest MMA promotion in existence. *Bellator: MMA Onslaught* features fighters of different disciplines from around the world competing to become the world's reigning champion.



Jet Set Radio

Format PSN **ETA** Summer **Pub** Sega **Dev** Sega

One of the most beloved Dreamcast exclusives, *Jet Set Radio* is coming to PSN. The game—about a gang of rollerblading graffiti artists in a police-dominated Japan—will receive the full HD remake treatment.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Snaaaaaaaake!

Recent confirmation of *Metal Gear Solid 5* has us foaming at the mouth for more stealthy action.

▲ Lovely Leaks

Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune inadvertantly announced he's working on a new PS Vita title. And no, it's probably not a *Mega Man* game.

▲ Free to shoot

Developer CCP's upcoming FPS MMO, *Dust 514*, won't cost us a dime—unless we want it to. Free to play saves the day!

▼ Gravity Slow

The good news: *Gravity Rush* has a release date. The bad news: It's not until June.

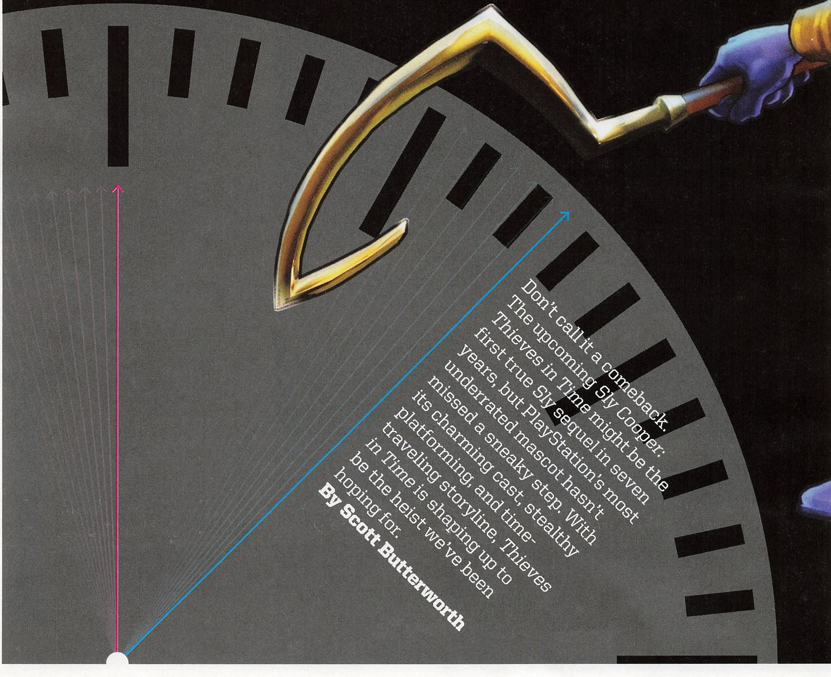
▼ Vitapology

So remember when we said Vita's charger can be plugged in backwards? We were wrong. Sorry!

▼ Pricey Games

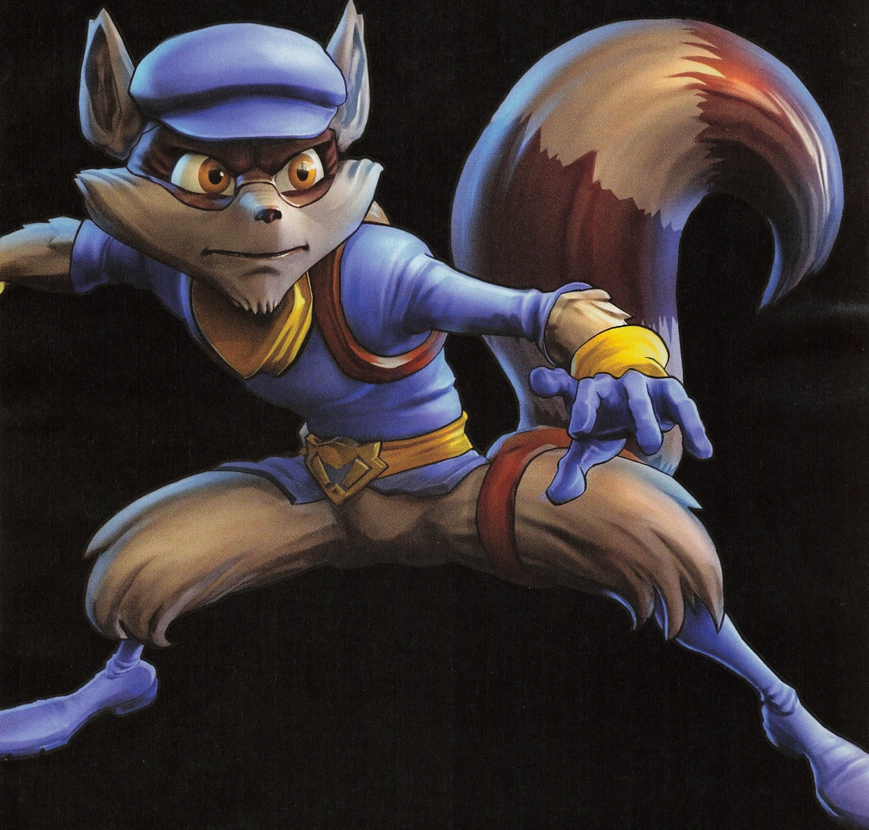
We love Nathan Drake, but $50 is a hefty price for a portable title.

Time Bandits



Don't call it a comeback. The upcoming Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time might be the first true Sly sequel in seven years, but PlayStation's most underrated mascot hasn't missed a sneaky step. With its charming cast, stealthy platforming, and time-traveling storyline, Thieves in Time is shaping up to be the heist we've been hoping for.

By Scott Butterworth



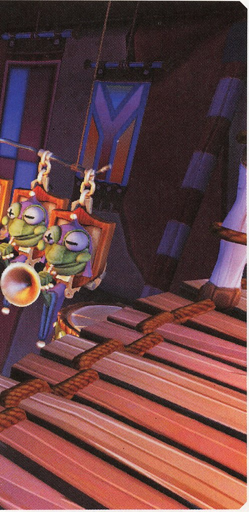
Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Sanzaru Games**

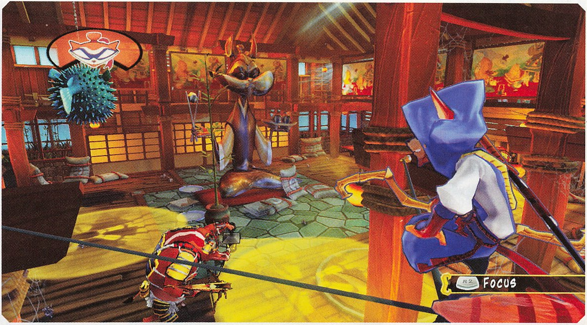
THERE'S AN ANTHROPOMORPHIC tiger in a brown Bruce Lee jumpsuit flailing wildly and hurling fireballs at us as the surrounding scaffolding quickly burns to the ground. He seems a little upset. "Burn, Cooper!" he spits past the well-chewed cigar that's somehow permanently affixed to his lower jaw. "'El Jefe'? Isn't that Spanish for 'big baby'?" Sly quips back. Signature cane in hand, we nimbly skip across the tops of a few bamboo trees that span the gap between us and our attacker, narrowly avoiding El Jefe's flaming projectiles in the process. The controls, like the humor, feel familiar, comfortable, natural.

Once we arrive at our assailant's platform and a few more choice insults are exchanged, we commence what's sure to be the first of many pattern-based boss battles. A wall of fire erupts, deadly clusters of lightning dance around us, and the setting sun spills over the distant Japanese countryside, yet the experience remains unmistakably lighthearted and decidedly *Sly Cooper*, which is no small feat. In fact, it's downright remarkable.

Not only has it been a full seven years since the last true *Sly* sequel (enough time to usher in a new console generation), series creator Sucker Punch Productions is no longer handling development. While they're off expanding the *inFamous* franchise, a young San Francisco Bay Area studio called Sanzaru Games has stepped in to create *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time.* But how does a team with just a handful of titles under its belt earn the right to tackle one of PlayStation's most beloved series? A deep and unwavering devotion.

"First and foremost, we are fans," emphasizes lead designer Mat Kraemer. "There's a reason we're making this game. There's a reason we spent our own money making the [*Sly 4*] demo and everything to get where we are. We wanted to see another





Accoring to Lead Designer Mat Kraemer, *Thieves in Time*'s storyline will "twist and turn more than people would think." Players could end up anywhere from Olde England to Feudal Japan (and show up dressed accordingly).

Sly Cooper game." That's right, Sanzaru actually approached Sony about creating a *Sly* sequel, not the other way around. According to Kraemer, the team built a fully playable *Sly Cooper* demo before they even pitched the concept. But their gamble paid off as Sony and Sucker Punch were impressed enough to put Sanzaru in charge of revitalizing the original trilogy for *The Sly Collection*, which in turn lead to Sony green-lighting *Thieves in Time*.

A Matter of Time

Needless to say, Sanzaru is completely committed to maintaining the cheeky charm and stealthy action-platforming essential to an authentic *Sly Cooper* experience. "If it doesn't feel like *Sly Cooper* and people who have played the old games aren't comfortable, then we failed," proclaims Kraemer. "That's really the root of the whole thing. If something doesn't work or it doesn't feel like *Sly Cooper*, it's not in the game. We cut it."

The sparkling visual cues of Sly's "thief senses," the lovable cast of sidekicks like technophile Bentley and lovable oaf Murray (and yes, the alluring Carmelita Fox), and old moves like the Stealth Slam all return. And that's just the big stuff. "I actually have a spreadsheet that goes through every single job, every single mechanic that is used in those jobs, basically every mechanic in the [earlier] games," reveals Kraemer. "We went through and we rated all those. We looked at all those mechanics and picked the ones that were fan favorites and our favorites

Timelines and Bloodlines A brief history of every Cooper Gang outing thus far

Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus
(PS2, 2002)
Sly's first adventure found his family's book of thievery stolen by the Fiendish Five. With the assistance of his friends, Sly ran, jumped, and sneaked his way through various locals, establishing the franchise's mix of cheeky humor and stealth-meets-platforming mechanics.

Sly 2: Band of Thieves
(PS2, 2004)
Sly's new goal: stop the revival of the Fiendish Five's leader, Clockwerk. This time, his teammates joined him in the field. Bentley used his hacking skills, and Murray bashed foes with his brute force. This game also introduced a more open structure that would become the series' standard.

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves
(PS2, 2005)
In this outing, Sly and the guys discover the Cooper family vault. Unfortunately, it's locked away on Kaine Island and protected by the evil Dr. M. Faced with an uphill battle, the team sets out to recruit new members, defeat Dr. M, and discover what exactly the Cooper family stashed.

The Sly Collection
(PS3, 2010)
Though this HD update of the original *Sly* trilogy didn't actually add any new content, it did mark the larcenous raccoon's first appearance on PS3 and, more importantly, gave *Thieves in Time* developer Sanzaru Games its first official crack at the franchise. An excellent starting point for newcomers.

PlayStation Move Heroes
(PS3, 2011)
In this non-canonical cross-over, Sly and Bentley join Jak and Daxter and Ratchet and Clank for a variety of motion controlled mini-games. While cute and fun, don't worry if you missed it—the story's not likely to impact the events of *Thieves in Time*.

and did bring those back."

Despite this feverish dedication to capturing Sly's essence, the team has plenty of fun new ideas up its sleeve as well. Case in point: time travel. *Time's* story picks up soon after the conclusion of *Sly 3*: Dr. M has been defeated, Sly is faking amnesia, and Bentley has settled down to build a time machine. And somehow, at some point, the pages of the Thievius Raccoonus—an ancient book and treasured heirloom that contains all the sneaky tricks of Sly's master thief ancestors—begin to change like Marty McFly's photo in the *Back to the Future* movies. Naturally, Sly and company must travel into the past to restore the legacy of the Cooper clan and nab whoever's trying to rewrite history.

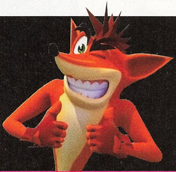
This means that every "episode" within the game takes place during a different historical era, from feudal Japan to medieval Europe. It also means we won't just interact with some of Sly's forebears, we'll actually *play* as them as well. "Sly is always the favorite, but if you look at the old games percentage-wise, you would play as Sly 70 to 75 percent of the time," explains Kraemer. "Now that 70 percent is broken into the ancestor and Sly. I feel that fans who play the ancestors will be just as comfortable playing as the ancestor as they would as Sly."

The Rest is History

Each of Sly's ancestors possesses both an instantly identifiable personality and some kind of unique ability. Expert-ninja-turned-sushi-chef Rioichi Cooper, for example, has mastered a move called Flying Dragon that allows him to instantly dart from point to point across long distances—simply by holding R2, highlighting a destination, and tapping X. As we'll discover, however, not all

The PLAYSTATION PLATFORMER CURSE?

Since *Sly* creator Sucker Punch is off working on *inFamous*, the duties of thievery have been turned over to Sanzaru Games. While Sanzaru seems plenty capable, other iconic PlayStation series have struggled when handed off to a new dev. *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex*, *Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly*, and *Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier* were all greeted much more negatively than their predecessors, mostly because they lacked polish and originality. With *Thieves in Time*, Sanzaru needs to be sure the final product nails that sweet spot between originality and familiarity. From what we've seen so far, they're certainly on the right track, but here's a look at a few franchises that weren't quite so lucky and where exactly they went wrong.



Crash Bandicoot

ORIGINAL DEVELOPER:
Naughty Dog
(*Crash Bandicoot, Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back, Crash Bandicoot Warped*)

As one of the original 3D platformers, Crash quickly became the poster boy for the PlayStation and singlehandedly put Naughty Dog on the map. Though a bit rough around the edges, the first game's quirkiness appealed to many players, and subsequent releases successfully improved the gameplay and introduced crazier characters and stages. All three games rank among the PSone's top sellers.

ADOPTIVE DEVELOPER:
Traveller's Tales
(*Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex, Crash Twinsanity*)

1999's spinoff *Crash Team Racing* marked the end of Naughty Dog's involvement. In 2001, Traveller's Tales released *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex*, the first on PS2. While the new game played well and was reminiscent of the previous entries, it became clear that people wanted something new. Sales dropped drastically, and after other developers failed to revive the series, *Crash* cratered completely.

Longtime fans will be delighted to hear a few familiar voices at work in *Time*, as the entire original cast puts in a repeat performance. Even *Uncharted*'s Nolan North managed to sneak in an appearance as El Jefe.

the Coopers are quite so slick. In some cases, history remembers them as far more heroic than reality bears out and Sly must rescue them from some sticky situations.

Lucky for him (and us), Sly will receive his own set of helpful new skills in the form of collectible disguises—at least one per time period, it seems. Though each must be earned in a different way, they can be equipped and utilized at any time once they've been unlocked. So far we've seen a thief ensemble capable of briefly slowing time, a suit of samurai armor than can deflect heavy attacks, and an archer uniform that comes with a fully functional bow and arrow, but the developers promise there will be many more to uncover.

Between Sly's disguises, his ancestor's abilities, and all the antics associated with time travel, *Time* promises to offer a rich diversity of gameplay. "One job, you're sneaking. The next one has you doing some minigame hacking thing with Bentley. Another job, you're driving a vehicle or using the paraglider. I think variety is another big part of what makes *Sly Cooper*," says Kraemer.

"It's kind of like a chemistry set," continues Kraemer. "You don't want it to explode. You want to keep it pretty much familiar to all the fans who played the old games, but you want to add some surprises. It's a difficult balance." A major part of maintaining that balance is consistency, especially consistency among the various characters. According to Kraemer, though players might regularly swap between ninjas and archers and thieves, the controls will remain largely the same regardless of what mechanics are in play. Basically, experts and beginners alike

Spyro the Dragon

ORIGINAL DEVELOPER:
Insomniac
(*Spyro the Dragon, Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage, Spyro: Year of the Dragon*)

Insomniac's *Spyro the Dragon* was praised for its pleasant visuals and unique gameplay, which featured a cocky little dragon who could blow fire and glide around the wide-open stages. Aided by decent voice acting and the burning of sheep, Spyro quickly rose to become PlayStation's number two mascot. He never quite escaped Crash's shadow, but he did enjoy three amazing outings on PSone.

ADOPTIVE DEVELOPER:
Check Six Games
(*Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly*)

Spyro's jump to PS2 was hardly graceful. Insomniac left to work on *Ratchet & Clank*, and Check Six Games took over for the series' first multi-console release. Unfortunately, *Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly* was a critical failure. Glitches, poor presentation, faulty controls, long load times, and stale gameplay contributed to the series' swift downfall, though Spyro eventually returned to prominence in 2011's *Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure*.

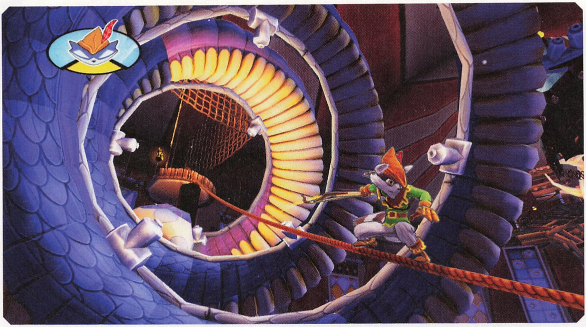
Jak and Daxter

ORIGINAL DEVELOPER:
Naughty Dog
(*Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy, Jak II, Jak 3*)

After leaving *Crash Bandicoot*, Naughty Dog went to work on *Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* for PS2. The result was a beautiful and widely praised 3D platformer full of character, challenge, and collectibles. The two sequels dropped Daxter from the title (but not the game) and featured more guns and darker stories. These changes raised some eyebrows, but all fears were assuaged when the games actually released.

ADOPTIVE DEVELOPER:
High Impact Games
(*Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier*)

Jak and Daxter's final adventure combined all the best aspects of the first three games while adding its own features like mutant Daxter segments and plenty of aerial battles. Unfortunately, the game lacked techincal polish, and the new features fizzled as a result. Bland stages and a boring storyline also contributed to *The Lost Frontier* falling well short of the beloved series' former glory.



should find the game's wildly varied mechanics more intuitive and exciting than difficult and overwhelming.

The Hour Draws Near

With that in mind, we strapped in for some hands-on time with…er, *Time*, playing first as gi-clad Rioichi, whose sushi shop had been overrun by El Jefe's henchmen (who were actually giant boars in threadbare samurai getups). The restaurant certainly looked the part: rice paper walls, lucky cat statues, bonsai trees…and big, breakable plates all over the floor that would alert the guards any time we so much as breathed on them, resulting in an instant fail.

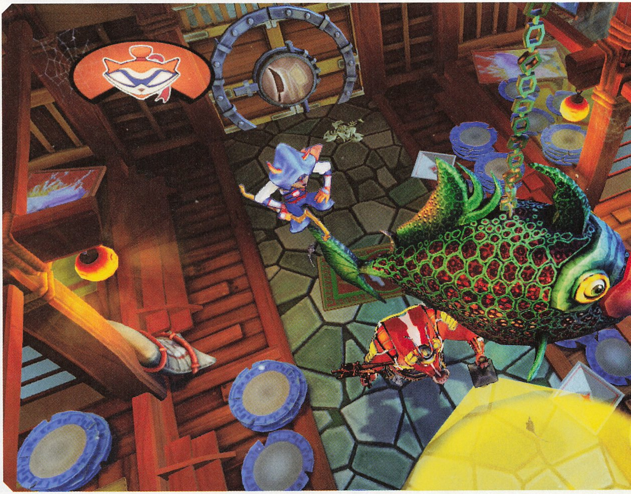
In classic *Sly* style, the level quickly became all about finding the stealthiest path through the environment, relying mainly on precision platforming and Rioichi's Flying Dragon technique. We shimmied up bamboo poles, balanced precariously on hanging fish sculptures, and slyly pickpocketed sleeping guards to the tune of a perfectly timed jazz bass line. Though we occasionally had trouble mashing the "interact" button at just the right moment to be yanked to our intended landing point, the controls proved intuitive and the level design was pitch perfect. The moving fields of laser alarms were an especially nice touch.

Next we stepped into the shoes of Sly himself for a mission in medieval England, where Sly's ancestor Sir Galleth Cooper was being held captive in a kind of bizarre circus tent. Unlike like the stealth-oriented sushi shop level, Galleth's mission played like a fast-paced, carnival-themed obstacle course. Using Sly's archer disguise, we fired rope-towing arrows to create paths through rings of fire and jumped swiftly between trapeze bars and tiny trampolines while avoiding comically large cannonballs. We found that driving forward with confidence lead to smooth, satisfying platforming, though we also discovered the game's generous checkpoint system this same way.

On the Sly

Rather than another full mission, the final stop on our tour of *Time* was actually an openworld hub. Each time period serves as a discrete episode within the

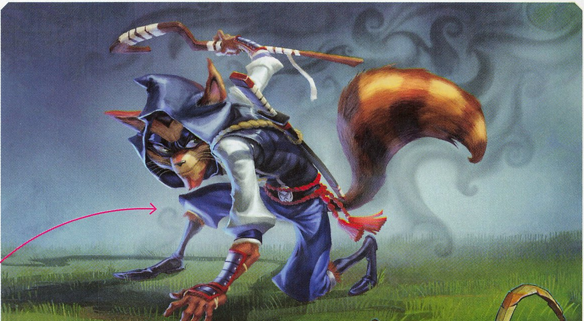
▼ *Sly*'s platforming works almost like an aim assist mechanic in a shooter. If players mash the "interact" button at the proper moment when jumping toward a specific landing point, they'll be pulled directy to the spot.



larger game, so each period contains a central hub where we can hunt for items, track down side quests, or initiate larger story missions. That stealth section in the sushi shop? Under normal circumstances, we would need to walk up to front door of the restaurant to start the mission, which might be easier said than done given the impressive size of feudal Japan's big, beautiful, brightly-hued village hub.

Though we didn't have too much time to explore, there are brand new collectible treasures (in addition to Sly's classic clue bottles) hidden among the world's pagodas and lush greenery. "I feel like, as a consumer, I want something that's going to last," says Kraemer. "I want a game that I'm going to buy and enjoy all the way to the end but there's more to it. To get through the whole game and collect all that stuff, it's going to take people a long time." This is especially true given that we can backtrack to previously unlocked areas once we earn new disguises and, with them, new traversal abilities. And much like past *Sly* games, the payoff for tracking everything down should be substantial. We're talking useful new abilities, not boring old concept art.

While so much remains unknown about *Thieves in Time* (What villains will return? What eras will we visit? What's the effin' deal with Sly and Carmelita?), everything we saw in our hands-on time pointed to a strong rebirth for the *Sly Cooper* franchise. The voice acting, the cel-shaded graphics, the soundtrack—it's all as endearing and inclusive as ever. And we can surely all agree on one thing: it's about time.

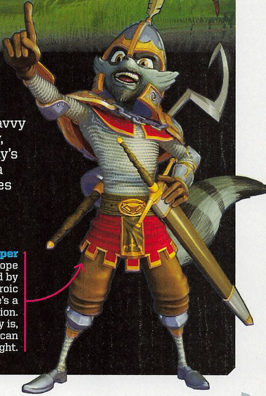


A FAMILY AFFAIR

We all know happy-go-luck hippo Murray, tech-savvy turtle Bentley, and charming, roguish raccoon Sly, but *Thieves in Time* is about to introduce us to Sly's extended family. Every episode revolves around a different Cooper ancestor, each of whom posseses both a unique ability and a distinct, recognizable personality. Here are the first two of many.

NAME: **Rioichi Cooper**
TIME PERIOD: Feudal Japan
ABOUT: Rioichi is both a master ninja and an accomplished sushi chef. Stoic, stern, and capable, his Leaping Dragon move allows him to dart instantly from point to point.

NAME: **Sir Galleth Cooper**
TIME PERIOD: Medieval Europe
ABOUT: Though painted by history as a gallant, heroic knight, reality reveals he's a bit more talk than action. We're unsure what his ability is, but we're confident Sly can set him straight.



STARING INTO THE FACE OF TOMORROW

What does the future hold? We ask the man who knows.

Today's consoles have given us at least three generations of games. Despite being told time and again that hardware is "maxed," devs have found ways out of almost every dead end. That the machine you bought in 2006 can play *Battlefield 3* is a miracle. Just imagine what those people could do with six times the power. With the help of images taken from existing games on a hi-spec PC, we ask Codemasters lead artist Mike Smith to show us the future.

IMAGE
EVE ONLINE

BETTER ACTING

Why it will change gaming

For all the buzz about *L.A Noire*, its vaunted facial capture folded under questioning, much like its suspects. Actor movements were meticulously recorded, for a start, which limited them to strictly scripted dialogue and saw them "swim" atop bodies that were captured elsewhere. What you really want is an animation rig that can morph through an entire performance seamlessly and dynamically.

The developer says

"More memory to run more bones, and more processing power to run more bones on each character—then every part of every limb can move differently. You can have more bones for skinning, so that muscles can roll over bones correctly, so that stuff we approximate at the moment can have higher fidelity. That's really obvious with faces, where you have all these nuances that humans are programmed to see."

“Many current games can’t even manage 720p, especially in 3D”

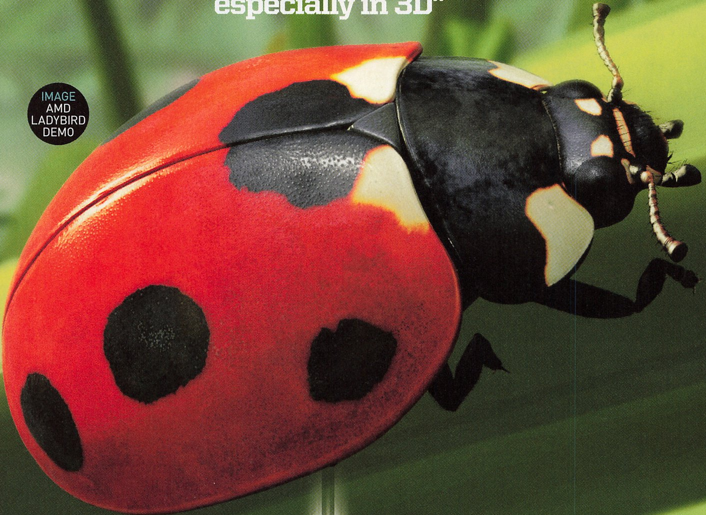


IMAGE AMD LADYBIRD DEMO

STUNNING IMAGE QUALITY

Why it will change gaming

Edge-smoothing techniques such as FXAA (Fast Approximate Anti-Aliasing) and SMAA (Subpixel Morphological Anti-Aliasing) are fast making “jaggies” extinct, but that’s just part of the equation. We never *did* get that 1080p standard they used to sell us all those televisions—many games can’t even manage 720p, especially in 3D—so next-gen has an obvious target. Question is, though: does it really need to hit it?

The developer says

“You’d expect 1080p will become the norm, but again it’s down to perception. You could probably get away with a lower resolution if your image quality elsewhere was up to scratch: Nice blurring on edges so you don’t get jaggies; good gamma range for things like HDR; representation of light levels that’s more filmic; then things like frame rate and smooth gameplay.”

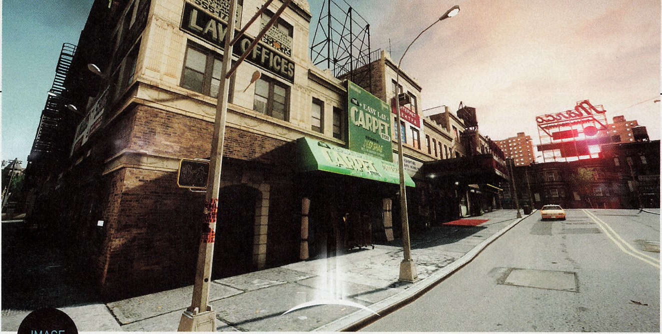


IMAGE
GTA IV

ARTISTIC LIGHTING

Why it will change gaming

For game artists—like any other artist—lighting is *everything*. It binds scenes together, turning them from a patchwork of textures, boxes, and spotlights into a natural, cohesive, and evocative environment. Light from just a few sources can now be bounced between objects, creating an interplay of light and shadow that echoes reality and gives the materials lives of their own.

The developer says

"If you look at the amount of effort that goes into lighting at companies like Pixar, we're quite some way away from being able to leverage that control. It can be very expensive to bounce light around as you would to render a scene offline. Once we have a toolset to do that, art directors can go crazy with effects. So, rather than photorealistic or cel-shaded, you'll be able to have lots in between, just like in cinema."

DENSER PARTICLES

Why it will change gaming

If you think you've seen smoke when a tank blows up in *Modern Warfare*, you haven't seen *half* what a dynamic particle system can achieve. Enormously taxing for even the most powerful PC graphics processing units (GPUs), this is one area where consoles can gain significantly.

The developer says

"A new console can do more *stuff*—the next-gen mindset will be that if you drive a car through some smoke, or if a missile goes through it, you kind of want to see vortices and reactions."

MASSIVE BATTLES

Why it will change gaming

A game like *Shogun 2: Total War* (pictured) can stage vast battles worthy of history. Units detailed enough for an intimate third-person actioner fill the screen in mo-capped battalions. Current consoles simply can't handle the load at a respectable fidelity.

The developer says

"We're very limited at the moment on a large war game like that, by memory as well as processing power. So, with increased specs you'd hope you can have more A.I. routines running on more A.I. units: more soldiers or monsters, basically."

IMAGE
NFS: HOT PURSUIT

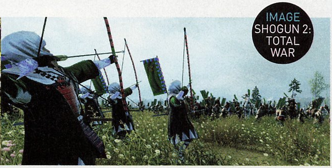


IMAGE
SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

IMAGE
CRYSIS 2

THE FILMIC LOOK

Why it will change gaming

You've seen it already in the lens flare, grain, and other such effects in *Crysis*, *Battlefield*, and *Mass Effect*. Just building, lighting, and texturing a world brings you only the most basic version of what's seen in movies. Tone mapping, light adaptation, good-bokeh depth of field (attractive out-of-focus areas), and simulated film stock are fast emerging as the next steps.

The developer says

"It's more the aesthetic of a game, but it's going to be a big one for next-gen. Slightly increased detail—but color treatment and all that stuff are going to be the things people *really* notice, because the overall scene is more considered and refined. It's pretty much about GPU horsepower. You can imagine backing up those effects on top of a scene again and again and again—that's a processing issue."

"Color treatment and all that stuff are going to be the things people really notice"

SMARTER ENEMIES

Why it will change gaming

A.I. has long been seen as the weakest link, but how smart does it have to be? Do we really want enemies that think like humans, or just a compelling illusion?

The developer says

"A.I. is a tricky one because people think it's about decision-making. More often than not, it's about player interpretations. The way to communicate clever A.I. is to push more in terms of animation, so enemies might *feel* more human."

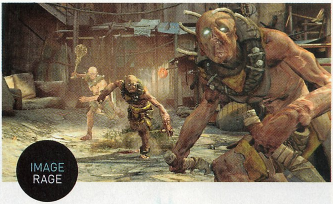


IMAGE
RAGE

RICHER LANDSCAPES

Why it will change gaming

A vast open world that doesn't even appear until you're close enough isn't really a vast world at all, but rather the impression of one.

The developer says

"The key thing limiting game worlds is memory. You can only store a certain amount of textures on current-gen hardware. With more memory and more processing power, we can push that so that the high levels of detail you see close-up could go out further."

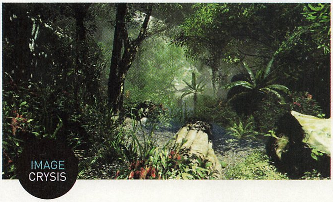


IMAGE
CRYSIS

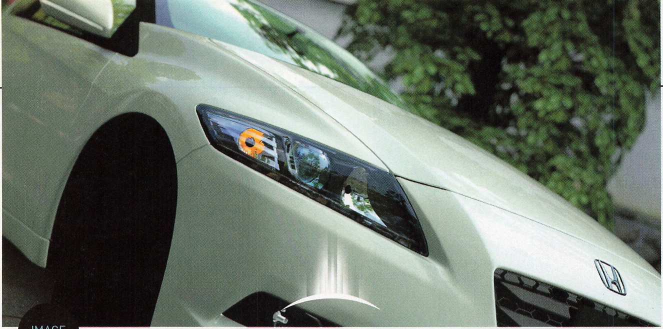


IMAGE
GT5

PHOTOREALISM

Why it will change gaming

The photorealism seen in *Forza* and *Gran Turismo*'s Photo Modes will come a lot closer to running in real time. Not completely, perhaps, but they'll at least clean up their numerous rough edges. Other games will choose to pursue believability over realism, for which next-gen hardware is actually more beneficial.

The developer says

"There's nothing to stop crazy color palettes in the current gen, but it's more the representation of how light falls upon materials and how that's output to the screen. We'll be able to see a lot more photorealistic approximations of things like skies through exposure changes and HDR, next-gen."

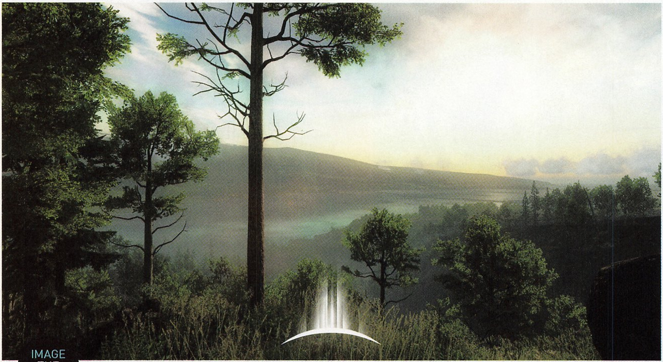


IMAGE
THE
HUNTER

PROCEDURAL CONTENT GENERATION

Why it will change gaming

Building environments by hand requires time and money. Sometimes a studio can't afford either. That's where procedurally generated worlds come in. These are simply environments spun by formulae in real time. We've seen them previously in the likes of *Oblivion* and *The Hunter* (PC).

The developer says

"You can use procedural generation to significantly reduce art times, but it can make worlds repetitive if you use it wrong. The tricky stuff for developers is tying the material that's procedurally generated to the game systems and A.I. data."

IMAGE MASS EFFECT 2

SUPER TEXTURES

Why it will change gaming

Two words: *Mass Effect*. The faces are detailed enough, the costumes are muddy. If you make a game about detailed characters in a cinematic world then something's got to give elsewhere: such is the austerity of old console hardware. Pictured is the PC version of *Mass Effect 2,* modded to include much higher-res textures. But is that all it takes?

The developer says

"On current-gen hardware you can throughput some big textures, but you can't do many of them on many models at a time. With more memory you can load more stuff. That's the easy win. The more exciting thing for me is what you'll be able to do with shaders; layer-up advanced shader techniques like subsurface scattering and reflections, plus add detail maps for things like fabric and skin pores. So rather than everyone just looking to increase the texture resolution, there are more efficient ways to cover those edge cases."

MEDAL [redacted] [redacted] OF HONOR [redacted] WARFIGHTER

THE [redacted] REAL STORY

No names, no dates, no [redacted], but Medal of Honor Warfighter recreates the War on Terror through the [redacted] of the real Spec Ops soldiers. Michael Gapper reports from [redacted]

"Yeah, it takes 10 minutes to dress up like a commando," says "Tyler," one of the three Tier One operators working hands-on with *Medal of Honor Warfighter*. "But it takes ten years to become one. I feel like that's what other games are doing. They're dressing up like a commando, they're putting Navy SEALs in the game, but they're not really capturing what it is to be a commando. Why? Because they're not working with the people who know."

Tyler is—or was—a part of America's special operations forces. In Britain there's the SAS, in Poland it's the GROM, in Germany it's the KSK, and in America it's the SEALs and Delta Force. "Tier One isn't special operations," says Tyler. "Tier One is the top tier of special operations. Tier One is the best of the best of the best."

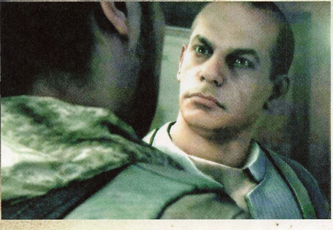
There has never been a game like *Warfighter*. A hundred games look and feel like the new *Medal of Honor*, but only *Warfighter* was born in the middle of a real war.

Sitting beside Tyler are "Kevin" and "Nate." Their real names? Nobody will say. Who did they work for? Again, nobody will say—no locations, no names, no dates...but these are the men who wrote the story of *Warfighter* while in the middle of a warzone. The details, of course, have been changed.

No names, no dates then, but if you were watching TV in 2005, you probably saw a report about it.

"Nate and I were overseas on a border region in a very hot area," says Kevin. "The political climate was very touch and go. There were things going on and we were literally 30 kilometers away from fixing the problem. When you're in those environments for an extended period under great risk, you're asking yourself, 'Does my country have a political will?'"

"So, we had a notebook, almost exactly like this one." He shows us a small, black, line-ruled book. "We



called it our Vent Book—it was kind of a humorous way for us to sit and write about operations we went on or didn't go on. When we had time off we procured a bottle of vodka and thought about what would happen if we took the Vent Book and turned it into a manifesto, so to speak, on how we would fight the War on Terror.

It became a different way to vent and to escape from the environment. We worked on it and we ended up with a manuscript, and I said to Nate, 'I know somebody in LA, let's just see, on a total gamble, how this is received.'"

> **"Their first [redacted] was very aggressive. It had a lot of teeth. Imagine [redacted] *Man on Fire* or *Unforgiven*... Imagine we were [redacted] let loose to go fight this war."**

War on Their Terms

In 2006, Kevin handed the *Warfighter* manuscript to *Medal of Honor's* executive producer, Greg Goodrich. "I read it and my wife read it and we agreed, this story needed to be told," says Goodrich. "It absolutely had to be told."

"Their manuscript was very aggressive," says Goodrich about the first draft. "It had a lot of teeth. Imagine a story like *Man on Fire* or *Unforgiven*...it was like 'imagine if there were no red tape or approval process, and we were just let loose to go fight this war.'"

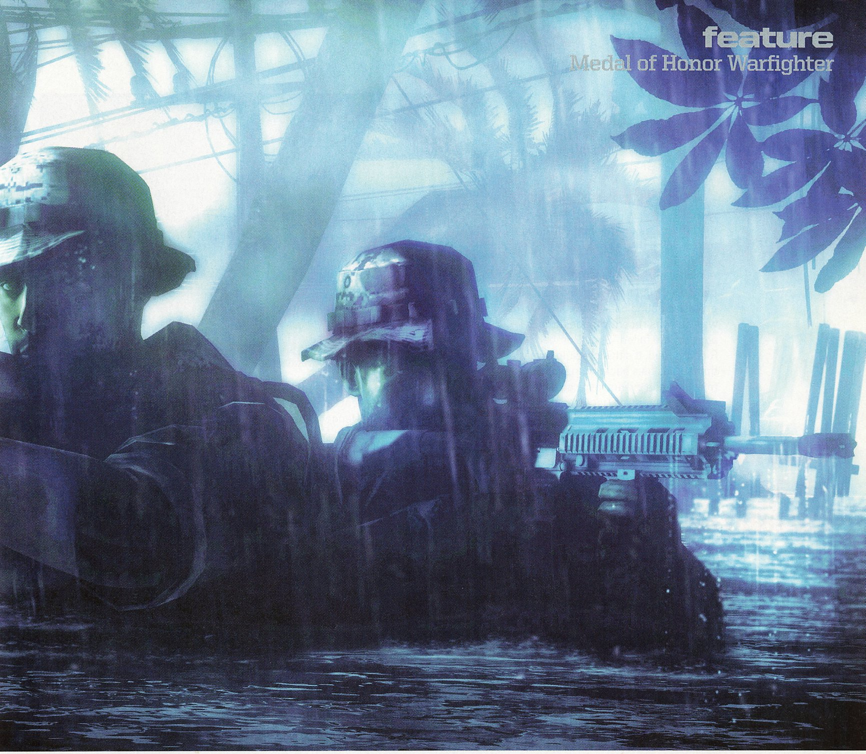
Goodrich and a small team at EALA began work on *Warfighter* as a brand new IP for EA, while *Medal of Honor* (2010) was already well underway just down the hall.

But *Medal of Honor* needed fixing more than *Warfighter* needed creating, so the two teams were rolled into one. Characters and details from Nate and Kevin's manuscript made it into *MOH*—operators Mother and Preacher, most notably—setting *Warfighter* up to be *Medal of Honor's* sequel should the revival be a success, but meaning the game itself would take extra time.

"*Warfighter* needed some tweaks," says Goodrich. "There were moments that weren't quite in line with what that *Medal of Honor* name brings to the game. We're not allowed to go over the top, turn it to eleven, and do things so completely out of the ordinary. That's not *Medal of Honor*, but we can tell a story about a man and a wife and the troubles they're having because of this war, and do it in a way that's honest and real and relatable."

Warfighter's demo begins with a harsh voiceover—Preacher's wife Laina breaks up with her husband over the phone.

"These men are on operations 200 days of the year," says Goodrich. "They're training another hundred. The divorce rate in special operations teams is around 90 percent, but this is



the reason why they fight—for their loved ones back home. This is what the game's about." The phone conversation is a memory as Preacher prepares for battle.

"I know how this works," says Laina, down the line. "You make a million promises, you get Bella's hopes up, you start making plans and then you disappear."

"I don't want to fight," says Preacher.

"You live for it."

Preacher and Task Force Mako breach the Basilan capitol building, and the firefight begins.

"Every *MoH* over the last 12 years has focused on an identifiable battle or fight," says Goodrich. "Normandy,

Walking around in soggy clothes after some stealthy sneakin' has *got* to be rather uncomfortable.

Market Garden, Pearl Harbor—even Operation Anaconda in the Shah-i-Kot valley. Everything was an identifiable battle. This is the first *MOH* ever that is not; this game is based on a threat."

Smarter Than the Average [Redacted]

Warfighter sends Preacher, Mother, and the rest of Task Force Mako around the world on the tail of a PETN smuggling ring.

Nearly undetectable, PETN—pentaerythritol tetranitrate—is an old explosive dating back to the first world war, but was recently made famous again by the failed "Shoe Bomber" Richard Reid. It's this credible threat that serves as a background for missions and events inspired by the real-life exploits of Tier One operators from across the globe.

> "Every mission [redacted] in this game has a dotted line to something that really happened."

No other game has so much expertise and no other game has given so much control to its military advisers. Between them, Kevin, Nate, and Tyler have written history, but ask them and they'll tell you they're not "the guy."

"Any guy that stands up at the front of the room and says, 'Yeah I'm the guy, I represent special operations...' That's a red flag in our community," says Kevin. "Nate and I were very careful. We don't want to steal from our brothers. At the same time, we wanted to let our brothers' stories inspire people."

And so every mission in *Warfighter* is real. It's the very best of the stories from Nate and Kevin's Vent Book, and from the stories told to Danger Close by the dozens of spec ops Tyler, Nate, and Kevin invited to EA's LA studio.

"Every mission and every event in this game has a dotted line to something that really happened," says Goodrich. "Authenticity... plausibility... *Medal of Honor* has always been about fictional stories woven through historical events. This game, even though it's not about one identifiable battle, is the same thing."

The Truth of War

It's inspired by events in the Philippines during 2009, as Abu Sayyaf terrorists seize control of Isabela City's Capitol building in the middle of a typhoon and take several aid workers hostage. Task Force Mako works alongside Filipino PCT counter-terrorist forces to storm the flooded building and extract the hostages. The team breach the Capitol building and blaze their way through the once-opulent lobby, now waist-deep in seawater.

Rain and water are among the modifications Danger Close have made to DICE's Frostbite 2 engine, making *Battlefield 3's* powerful next-generation engine even better. "Frostbite makes all this possible" says art director Chris Salazar. "I can rely on it to be honest and truthful, to make things look naturalistic, not realistic. One thing we're trying to do is make it not feel like you're a camera on legs or there's a lens in front of you that we throw grape jam on when you got shot. We're trying to develop something that's more about your own eyes, make it feel like you're really there. That's exactly what [*Saving*] *Private Ryan* was, right?"

Frostbite has set the team free. Wooden pillars and banisters splinter under fire, entire floors collapse, and terrorists pour from the upper floors as Frostbite does what it does best. The team storms their way through the building until the terrorists bring down much of the first floor with PETN charges, but Task Force Mako quickly recovers and assaults the offices, taking an alternate route and blasting through a side door.

"What separates the top tier community from even the special ops company, fundamentally, is intelligence," says Tyler. "Too many times when people are building a level or doing a scene for a movie, it's like they're doing it the hard way. Tier One is the scalpel, not the chainsaw. You do things by the smartest, easiest route."

A straight assault on entrenched enemies via the main corridor is possible but risky; better to hang a left and breach a side door. Stack up and

World War III [redacted]

Sign up with the SAS, Delta Force, [redacted], and [redacted] in *Warfighter* online

Warfighter's campaign is a globe-trotting shootout where Task Force Mako fights alongside the world's hardest special forces. The multiplayer game plays by the same rules.

"If I'm a kid growing up in Poland, I don't grow up wanting to be a U.S. Navy Seal," says executive producer Greg Goodrich. "I grow up wanting to be a GROM. If I'm in Germany I don't want to be anything other than KSK. It's the same all around the world. Let's take a page out of *FIFA's* book–let's allow players to feel that sense of national pride." So you represent your country as one of 12 special ops units.

"Honor, respect, brotherhood, sacrifice–those are not American owned traits," says Goodrich. "You get a lot of publishing types that say, 'Well, we don't sell a lot of units in Poland...' And I say, 'I don't care! This story is about GROM, this is about that brotherhood, this is about how they've operated together.'"

You can probably guess how the multiplayer will work, but expect *Warfighter's* new breaching system to play a key part–and expect your choice of operator to dictate more than just your character's physical appearance.

SAS versus SEALs on land is a very different fight to SAS versus SEALs on water, and if *Medal of Honor* is really all about respect, it needs to respect that.

△ No war game would be complete without lots of building-shattering explosions!

you get four options—Kick, Flash, Frag, and C4. A frag hits the center of the room hard, while C4 annihilates the door and anything on the opposite side—not smart in a hostage crisis. Kicking in the door, however, can give the terrorists time to act. So the smart move is Flash—blinding the terrorists, sparing the hostages, and allowing Mako to clear the room.

Only a Game

Danger Close are keeping the first half of the Basilan (it's an island province of the Philippines) level—a stealthy infiltration into Isabela City—secret, but the latter half is classic *Call of Duty* bad-guy Whack-a-Mole over intense stages littered with targets. The team drags the hostages from the Capitol building, and they flee through the flooded city in a water-based on-rails shooting gallery, before finally heading out to sea and tethering the boats to choppers to escape.

Warfighter sticks to *Call of Duty's* familiar formula—or rather, *Medal of Honor's* formula, if you trace the lineage back—and between the stop-and-pop shooting and the on-rails shootout, we start to wonder where all that expertise went. This isn't realistic, is it?

"It's *authentic* rather than realistic," says Nate. "They do a good job of replicating that stress and making it feel about as real as it can get in a game. Obviously in the real world we aren't likely to see that many bad guys, but trust me, it's stressful enough with only a few. To build that intensity within a game you need an overwhelming number of enemies, and you have to exaggerate the environment."

Tyler agrees. "Yeah, there's a lot of things you have to ramp up. Like, if I saw a room and twenty guys were all shooting at me, I wouldn't go in! But that's how a game is. The way the operators work? That's authentic: the sights, the sparks coming off a grenade, the technical parts of the game...I've never played a game that's more realistic than *Medal of Honor*, as far as the way your equipment works."

"There's nothing real about carrying that much ammunition," says executive producer Goodrich. "And there's nothing real about charging up the stairs, getting hit, healing up, and

> "The team drags [redacted] hostages from the Capitol and they flee through the [redacted] city, before heading out to sea and tethering [redacted] to the choppers to escape."

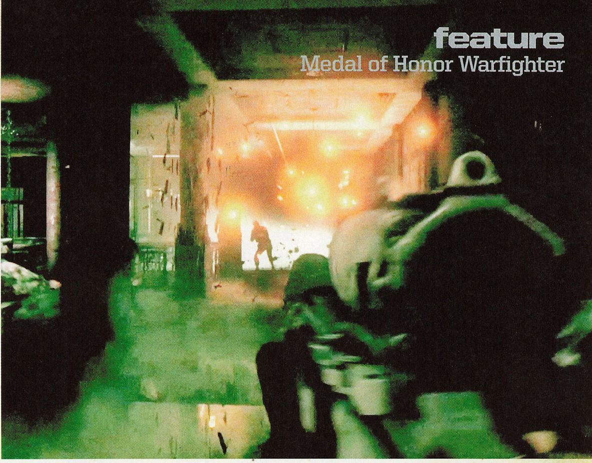
Well, at least he's trimmed his beard. Task Force Mako—same guys, only not so hairy.

> **"*BF3* is about the massive [redacted] of war, while *MOH* is more personal—[redacted] precision engagements."**

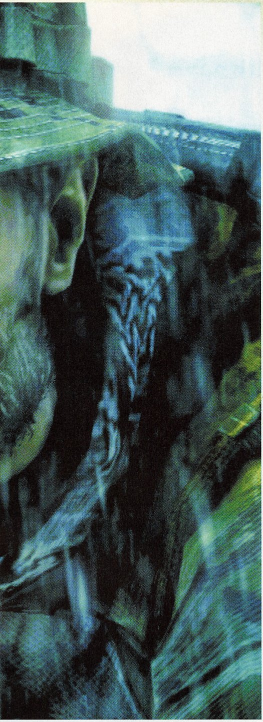
going back at it. But everything in that environment—the audio, the dialogue, the weapons, the chatter—everything else can be completely authentic and plausible, but we hardly ever use the word 'real'."

Danger Close exists to fill the hole between *Battlefield* titles, but they've found an identity of their own thanks to dozens of consultant spec ops soldiers. *Battlefield 3*, says Goodrich, is about the massive hammers of war, while *Medal of Honor* is more personal—smaller missions, precision engagements. But what, then, is *Call of Duty*?

"The other guys," says art director Chris Salazar, referencing *Modern Warfare 3* without ever referencing *Modern Warfare 3*, "have no problem going way over the top and doing a lot of crazy things. But telling a personal story is different. It's not like you're random dude number 25 in some giant war somewhere. What these SEALs do is already incredible enough that it requires very little embellishment.



▲ We have the Frostbite 2 engine to thank for the environmental destruction.



We look at the competition and say, 'I don't want to be too stylized, I don't want to be too Hollywood.'"

"If you play some of those other games you get bullets and bombs whizzing by your head for eight hours," says Nate. "But with *Warfighter* you actually get a glimpse of real stories from these guys' lives. It's a completely different outlook than what you're going to get with other games. There's a caring side, there's a human side. We don't eat, drink, and sleep bullets. You guys write and report—that's your job. For us, this is our job."

"I'll be the first to tell you, I love *Call of Duty*," says Goodrich. "I have friends at Infinity Ward and Treyarch who go back almost twenty years. I love *COD*. Sometimes I enjoy soda pop and sometimes I enjoy a different drink. Sometimes you want to go see *Band of Brothers*, and sometimes you want to see *Black Hawk Down*. It's just a different take, it's a different flavor."

The Real Thing

So how far is Goodrich prepared to go to maintain *Medal of Honor's* unique flavor? A lot farther than we had ever imagined. "I actually wrote my resignation twice during the last game," he says. "There were certain things that were going to be done that I knew wouldn't sit right by these guys, and I would have had to betray their trust, so instead I wrote my resignation. I took it to my boss and he said 'OK, OK! We won't do that!' In the end we've been able to do something no one in Los Angeles ever does, and give the guys final cut."

"EA's patience has allowed us to bring in dozens of operators," says Kevin. "Operators involved in every major operation from Noriega and Beirut to Iraq and Afghanistan."

No game has ever had so much expertise thrown at it, but no game needs it more. *Medal of Honor* was born of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*; it carried Steven Spielberg's name on the box and still bears a duty to respect fallen and living soldiers.

"Honor is the biggest word in that title," says Goodrich. "It's not about the medal, it's about the men, it's about respect and letting gamers feel that. Our orders are to just say 'thank you', we appreciate you, we don't take you for granted. If you follow that sort of mantra, everything else is easy." ■

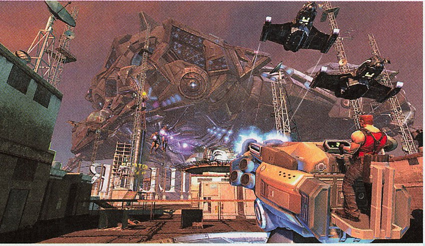
Politically [redacted] Correct

Conservative or Liberal, pro or anti, *Warfighter* wants you

Nobody asks how the executive producer, Greg Goodrich, feels about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, if only because everyone is too polite. But his respect for soldiers is clear. For Goodrich, whether you support or oppose the War on Terror has no bearing on supporting the men. "Last year we had the guys in front of mass-market press," he says. "One journalist was pushing about killing the enemy, and it just went to a place that was offensive. One of the guys leaned forward and said, 'Look, what I do on a daily basis has absolutely nothing to do with the hate that I have for the enemy in front of me; it has everything to do with the love for the brother I have behind me. That's why I fight.' That became our mantra; let's not focus on that target, let's focus on who we're running with."

10 BAD PS3 GAMES YOU HAVE TO PLAY

So bad they're good? Pah! Try so insanely awful they're damn near essential. The following 10 games all manage to walk that fine line between being bad and being bad in an amazing, must-see way. Whether it's through ultra-swears, cringe-worthy "sexiness," or the virtual slaughter of feral gazelle, these are the PS3 titles so offensive, pathetic, and hopelessly garbage they demand to be played.



1 DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

PUB **2K GAMES** DEV **GEARBOX** REL **JUNE 2011**

What is it? The Most Delayed Game of All Time. Uh, it's also a clunky shooter with decade-old mechanics and a sense of humor about as amusing as syphilis.

Why is it bad? Graphics that look like they could be powered on a pocket calculator, bosses that represent the joyless ghost of infuriating difficulty spikes past... Oh, and the way *Forever* depicts women is just plain embarrassing.

Why play it? Development hell may have eroded Duke's charms, but, if nothing else, Duke and his game have personality. Plus, you get shrunk and can ride an RC car, which has us channeling an R-rated version of *Toy Story*.

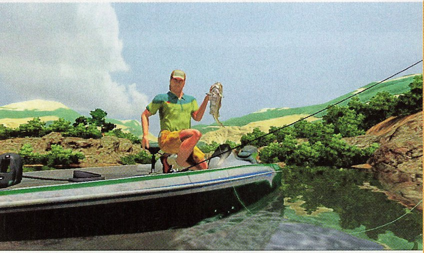
2 NPPL CHAMPIONSHIP PAINTBALL 2009

PUB **ACTIVISION** DEV **SAND GRAIN STUDIOS** REL **NOV 2008**

What is it? It's all the pleasures of real-life paintball condensed into a cheap and cheerful FPS, minus the chances of getting a bullet in the face.

Why is it bad? The A.I. is terrible, and you can wipe yourself clean after getting shot, which means matches can last forever.

Why play it? Its capture-the-flag style matches are a silly treat, and weapons can be upgraded to dish out maximum paint-based pain. There's also something endearing about a game that thinks having officially licensed paintball teams is a major selling point.



3 CABELA'S DANGEROUS HUNTS 2009

PUB **ACTIVISION** DEV **FUN LABS** REL **SEPT 2008**

What is it? A hunting sim that allows you to channel your inner homicidal redneck by letting you track and kill some of the globe's most deadly and endangered species of big cats and bears.

Why is it bad? It looks as appealing as a hyena's butt, while the frame rate is like watching a kid's flipbook. Oh, and you have to perform a horribly jarring Sixaxis-sponsored QTE roughly every 22 seconds.

Why play it? Sometimes in games, as in life, you just have to slaughter yourself some Asiatic black bears. For such occasions, there really is just one PS3 series that can service such mammal-murdering desires.

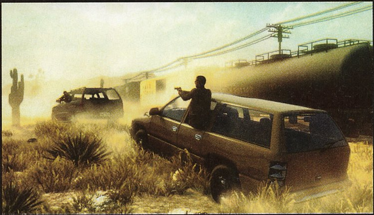
4 RAPALA FISHING FRENZY 2009

PUB **ACTIVISION** DEV **FUN LABS** REL **SEPT 2008**

What is it? A fishing game in which you manipulate your lure with Sixaxis controls to catch those fish-suppers-in-waiting.

Why is it bad? Imagine the worst camera you've ever experienced in a game. Now multiply that level of disorientating fury by three, toss a few fish fingers on top, and you've got *Rapala's* unruly abomination. The clipping is so bad it's like playing in a physics-free dimension. Worse, there's only a paltry 21 fish—and most of them are boring varieties of trout.

Why play it? Get a friend and make them play—you'll be guaranteed a night of hilarity. The sight of someone attempting to bag a cod with Sixaxis controls is simultaneously one of the most pathetic and life-affirming sights available on PS3.



5 CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL

PUB **UBISOFT** DEV **TECHLAND** REL **JULY 2011**

What is it? A broken dud of a cowboy game that ditches the Wild West for, um, central LA.

Why is it bad? Last time we checked, fairly important ingredients in cowboy titles were such trifling concepts as being set in the Old West, firefights in saloons, and six-shooters. The whole thing is also vaguely racist and thoroughly unpleasant.

Why play it? Because its awfulness is addictive. Ploughing through *The Cartel* is like being unable to look away from horrible accidents on the freeway: you just have to see how bad it gets. This is just playable enough to showcase its captivating crapness.

6 KUNG FU LIVE

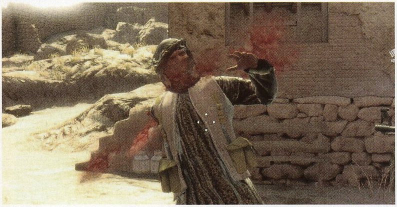
PUB / DEV **VIRTUAL AIR GUITAR** REL **DEC 2010**

What is it? A 2D beat-'em-up that scans your image into the game using PlayStation Eye, letting you pummel away at bad guys with your own exercise-shy gamer fists. Magic, huh?

Why is it bad? Not only can the PS Eye barely read your flailing movements, but you've got to play in a room as bright as the sun for the damn thing to even recognize your image.

Why play it? It's you! On a screen! Starring in your own personal kung fu movie... albeit a garbage one. Still, any game that puts our pasty faces into the action, then lets us assault tank top-sporting '80s goons deserves some sympathetic lovin'.

WHOA! I CANNOT BELIEVE I JUST DID THAT!



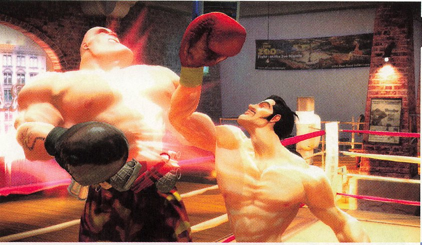
7 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK

PUB **ACTIVISION** DEV **CAULDRON** REL **NOV 2007**

What is it? An ultra-violent FPS with more excessive gore and flowing intestines than a night spent stuffing your face while watching *Hostel*.

Why is it bad? The A.I. is horrifically remedial. Worse than the shoddy enemy behavior, however, is the disastrously one-note pacing. There's no variation, ever. All you do is pump terrorists full of unbelievably dismembering lead.

Why play it? One word: dismemberment—of such a level that even Tarantino's inner gore-hound would be utterly appalled. Alright, so that's several words, but the point still stands. The general rule here is that if you can see a limb or appendage, you can reduce it to a bloody stump. Forget mere decapitations: we're talking severed shins, elbows, and torn stomach linings. Brutal.



8 FACEBREAKER

PUB **EA SPORTS** DEV **EA CANADA** REL **SEPT 2008**

What is it? A "zany" cartoon boxer trying to capture the winning wackiness of the old *Ready 2 Rumble* games.

Why is it bad? It has the most infuriating A.I. of any PS3 fighter. Thought Seth in *Street Fighter IV* was a move-spamming scoundrel? Try playing this. *Facebreaker's* near-indestructible pugilists boast invincible chins and can seemingly throw hundreds of punches every few seconds.

Why play it? For those oh-so glorious titular mug-mangling KO punches. Land a haymaker and an X-ray shows the bones in your opponent's head break like delicate pieces of fine china.

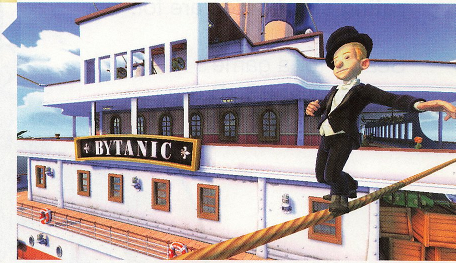
9 LEISURE SUIT LARRY: BOX OFFICE BUST

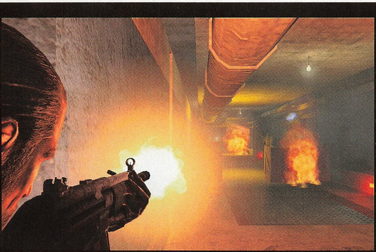
PUB **CODEMASTERS** DEV **TEAM 17**
REL **MAY 2009**

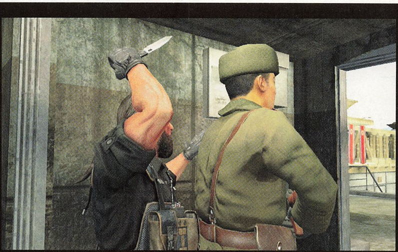
What is it? Gaming's first pervert creeps on to PS3 sporting a camo-suit and matching binoculars in this truly creepy, off-putting adventure title.

Why is it bad? Catching your parents at it when you're a kid would be precisely 83 percent less awkward than the gags in this monstrosity. Its repetitive fetch quests mainly revolve around touring Hollywood-style movie studios while scrubbing genital doodles off walls.

Why play it? It's the most puerile, juvenile experience on PS3—and we've all still got a puerile, juvenile kid in us that laughs himself silly at any mention of fart or boob gags.







10 ROGUE WARRIOR

PUB **BETHESDA** DEV **REBELLION** REL **DEC 2009**

What is it? The second-worst videogame of all time, according to aggregator site GameRankings. It's also a hugely broken FPS starring the horrendously sweary larynx of Mickey Rourke.

Why is it bad? The weapons are the most inaccurate ever seen in an FPS. The collision detection is among the worst we've encountered, allowing you to empty entire rounds into baddies' foreheads without them even flinching.

Why play it? It's the most wonderfully curse-filled game ever. It makes *Scarface* look tame. The end credits alone see the Oscar-nominated actor riff a three-minute rap swearathon. Hilarious.

This is **Richard**. He knows it's his job to teach his son **Scotty** what this whole gaming thing is about. The age rating helps him **pick the right games**, but being a good dad means he always wants to know more.

That's exactly what the **ESRB's rating summaries** are for.

Search for a game's rating summary at **ESRB.org**.

Rich H.
Lafayette, IN

ESRB
ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE
RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

Let's face it: In terms of gameplay, *Mass Effect* is by no means the strongest series out there. Not even close. And the crazy thing is, most people probably wouldn't argue with that statement. Yet the franchise has enjoyed tremendous fan support and scored more 9s and 10s than Hugh Hefner himself.

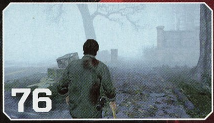
So what's the key to *Mass Effect's* massive success? Oddly enough, story. The universe is so deep, the narrative so engaging, the characters so believable that BioWare has managed to convince gamers that dialogue trees can be just as exciting as gratuitous explosions and blazing gun battles.

While it might sound like we're stating the obvious here, we just want to stand back for a moment and draw attention to how remarkable this is. What other series could not just survive, but *thrive* despite fussy controls and middle-of-the-road shooting mechanics? What other games engage us not just viscerally but emotionally and intellectually?

With *Mass Effect 3*, BioWare finally rounds out its epic trilogy. Can it survive the hype? Let's see how the story unfolds...

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

Following the release of Capcom's *Street Fighter X Tekken*, Namco will continue the collaboration/rivalry with its own follow up, *Tekken X Street Fighter*.



SILENT HILL: DOWNPOUR

That title's only half right. Yes, it rains a whole lot, but there's nothing silent about Silent Hill. Distant voices, cawing crows, us screaming like little girls...

RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY

Oh look, *another* creepy city filled with horrifying monstrosities that want to haunt our dreams. At least we get a lot of guns in this one...and it's a lot drier.

How we score our reviews...

10	**Awesome**	Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.
9	**Excellent**	Highly recommended and a great investment.
8	**Great**	Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.
7	**Good**	Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.
6	**Acceptable**	A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.
5	**Mediocre**	A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.
4	**Flawed**	Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.
3	**Poor**	A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.
2	**Awful**	A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.
1	**Raw Sewage**	Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.

N7

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Mass Effect 3

It's the end of the world as we made it

From the moment we first set foot on Eden Prime all the way through the battle with the Collectors, we've grown more and more attached to Commander Shepard. And now, we've finally reached the finale to the *Mass Effect* trilogy. On one hand, we're absolutely thrilled to see how things wrap up, but there's also a great deal of sadness in seeing such an epic story arc come to an end. After all, we've spent a lot of quality time with Shepard, shaping him (or her) into our own personal hero. Whether renegade or paragon, bald male or redheaded female, the choice was ours. Seeing how all of these decisions would come together in *Mass Effect 3* was easily the game's biggest draw...and it doesn't disappoint.

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Electronic Arts **Dev** BioWare **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** a fitting finale that heroically conquers all the hype.

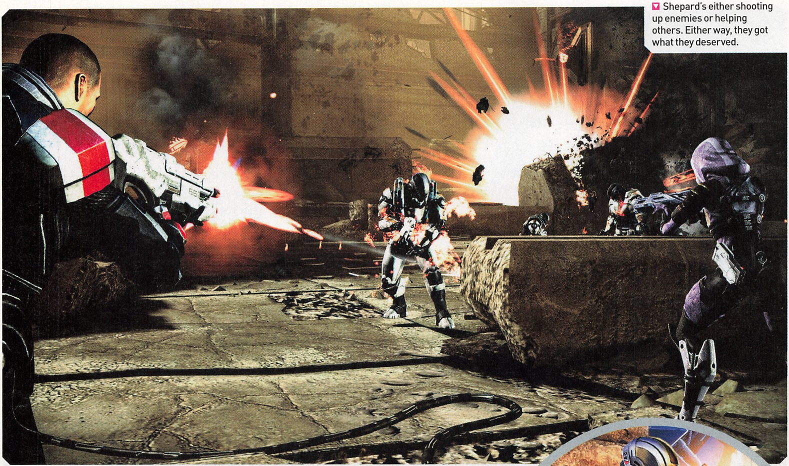
We've known about the impending Reaper invasion (those massive, synthetic aliens intent on destroying all life in the galaxy) since the end of *Mass Effect 2*, but the full force of that threat hits in the game's opening moments. Having been sequestered on Earth since the last game, Shepard is there when the planet is attacked and is tasked with stopping the Reapers and saving the entire galaxy. No big deal.

After rejoining the starship *Normandy*, Shepard heads out to unite the galaxy against the Reapers, but it proves to be a rather complex task. We have to help other races take care of their own problems before they'll consider helping us with ours. Some suspension of disbelief is required to think that Earth would be fine while Shepard parades around assisting with minor political squabbles, but thankfully, there's much more to *ME3* than the invasion on Earth.

Want More?
Those who haven't played *Mass Effect 2* should really do so. Even those who have can replay it for a different experience. Finally, check out some *ME2* DLC–especially Lair of the Shadow Broker and Arrival.

Back in Action

Where *ME2* felt like Shepard was merely gathering the "dirty dozen" for a suicide mission, *ME3* feels more like a reunion with a galactic war as the backdrop. Key figures who've worked with Shepard over the past few games (assuming they actually survived) return here in some fashion. Some reprise their role as squadmates, a couple for the third game in a row, but there are a few new faces as well. Certain former teammates are now key story characters but don't actually rejoin the squad. These are some of the best story sequences of the entire series, especially since choices made in the prior games factor so heavily into how these play out. Other ▸▸



Shepard's either shooting up enemies or helping others. Either way, they got what they deserved.

teammates only return for smaller cameos that could easily be missed if players aren't taking on some of the more obvious side missions, but it's still nice to see them again.

After a few introductory missions, we're swept up into some fantastic set pieces that force Shepard to make more important decisions that could produce serious repercussions. This could mean helping old friends, betraying others, saving entire worlds, or wiping out a whole race. These situations are extremely moving, especially when combined with the hard-hitting action that helps make these scenes even more intense.

A Game for All

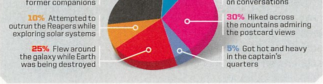
Despite efforts to make the game more accessible to newcomers (mainly through its slightly more action-oriented approach), it would be hard to recommend skipping over the prior games, as the pinnacle reached here means so much more if players are invested in the characters. *ME2* offered an interactive comic to catch players up to speed and allow them to make key decisions from the first game, but the same luxury is not available here. Those jumping in for the first time will need to catch up on their own.

The fight to save Earth stretches all across the galaxy.

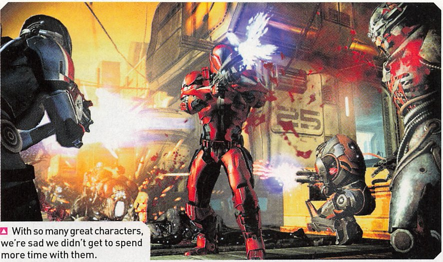
Where BioWare did succeed in being friendly to new players (as well as veterans) is the gameplay. There are three methods of play available, each with varying degrees of emphasis on story and action. Those interested in jumping straight into the action without worrying about making decisions will be able to do so, but the standard RPG mode where we have full dialogue options and complete character customization is also available. There's even an option to tone down the combat and focus instead on characters' interactions, so everyone can get what they want out of the game.

ME3 is not shy on action, as we blast through enemy forces with a refined

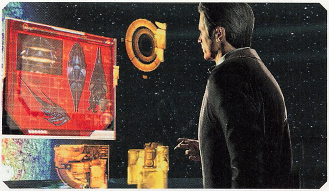
Fans of the original *Mass Effect* will be happy to know that deep weapon customization has returned.



What we did in... Mass Effect 3



With so many great characters, we're sad we didn't get to spend more time with them.



Multiplayer is a surprisingly impressive addition to *ME3*.

combat system. While still a third-person shooter, there's a lot more variety this time around. Environments are much more open and expansive. Enemy A.I. is a lot more intelligent, even if there aren't a ton of different foes to encounter. The game more than makes up for any lack of variety with some intense boss battles and major combat sequences.

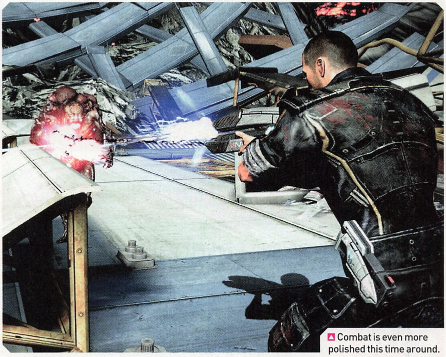
Shepard still has the same six classes available, and the mix of skills for each has improved greatly. Skill-tree advancement is more robust, as we have more powers to add to our arsenal and more choices when fine-tuning them. There's plenty of flexibility with weapons, armor, and customization, which helps make combat a highlight of the game.

Of course, Shepard's not alone on the battlefield, as there are a half-dozen squad members (more via DLC) to help out. They all offer their own sets of powers and weaponry, so creating the party that best compliments our Shepard is helpful but simply choosing the most interesting teammates is also completely viable.

Massive Variety

In terms of side content, planet mining returns, but it's quicker and only for optional quests this time. Still, expect to spend a lot of time on the space station Citadel turning in items for rewards. Despite being simpler, exploring solar systems and mining planets is rarely interesting and the rewards are rarely tangible.

Multiplayer is a surprisingly impressive addition to *ME3*—with such a refined combat system, it's actually a natural fit. We start off by selecting a race and one of the six standard classes. Humans are available to start, but more races can be unlocked over time. Battles consist of fighting waves of enemies in co-op, and at the end of the battle, experience points and credits are doled out based on how well the team performed. As we level up, we can develop our character by upgrading powers and unlocking new weapons. It's completely optional, but it's rather addictive and well worth trying out.



Combat is even more polished this time around.

ME3 has moments of greatness. Lots of them, in fact. The character interactions—especially for those of us who have been with these guys since the beginning—are the heart and soul of the game and do not disappoint. The game looks and sounds fantastic. Characters and environments are beautiful, and the voice acting is topnotch once again, especially Jennifer Hale's ever-perfect female Shepard. There are some noticeable issues with occasional framerate drops during cutscenes, but it's not a make or break problem since when the action hits, the game runs smoothly.

There are a few areas where the game does fall flat, especially the ending that goes out with a resounding thud. Despite that, the fine-tuned gameplay combined with some absolutely outstanding moments throughout the rest of the game more than make up for it. If ever a game was more about the journey than the destination, it's *Mass Effect 3*. And what a journey it is.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
9

MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

Cast List

THE GALAXY SAVIOR

Commander Shepard
The iconic N7 Alliance specialist tasked with saving the galaxy.

THE LOYAL FRIEND

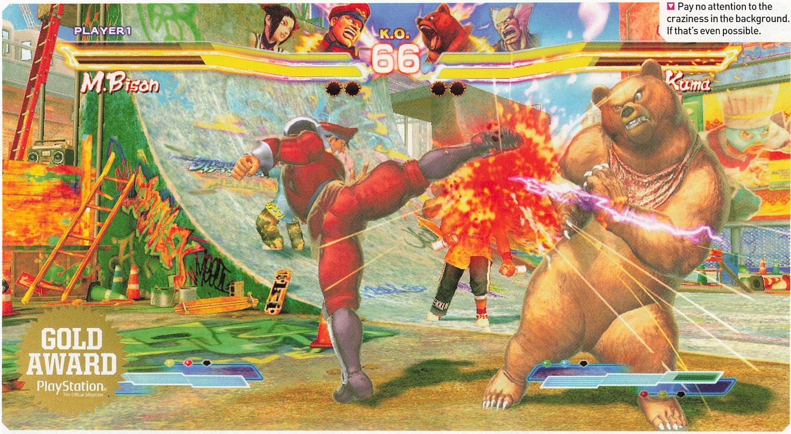
Garrus
A ruthless marksman, he's always willing to follow Shepard to hell and back.

THE SCIENTIST

Liara T'Soni
This dangerous Asari biotic has been on board since the first *Mass Effect*.

THE DUTIFUL SOLDIER

James Vega
An experienced soldier who gets swept up in Shepard's mission.



Pay no attention to the craziness in the background. If that's even possible.

Street Fighter X Tekken

It's fists versus fireballs in this showdown

Info

Format PS3
Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the best non-Marvel crossover since *Capcom vs. SNK*.

We never thought we'd see the day. After nearly two decades of arcade domination, the casts of Capcom's *Street Fighter* and Namco Bandai's *Tekken* series are going head-to-head in a tag-team, two-dimensional fighter that's a godsend for genre fans. Whether you're a student of Shotokan or a disciple of the Devil Gene, the sheer depth and production value of this crossover clash make it worthwhile for newcomers and diehards alike.

The transition to *Street Fighter X Tekken* (the X is pronounced "cross") will be easiest for those with a history in Capcom's six-button brawlers. The game features an enhanced version of *Street Fighter IV's* engine, but with radically different mechanics. The graphics take *SFIV's* comic book-like character designs and spruce them up with an explosion of eye-pleasing effects and fluid animations. And though there's only a scant 11 stages, some have multiple tiers, and each is chock full of goofy going-ons and franchise Easter eggs.

Tekken fans needn't worry about combating endless waves of projectiles, though: everyone has ways of getting past the fireball spamming that some Ryu and Sagat players propagate. Though the pugilists from the King of Iron Fist Tournament now use three punches and three kicks, many of their target combos play off the same left-right attack strings that define the series. As with any self-respecting fighting game, there's a tutorial that'll help teach rookies the new mechanics, while vets can jump straight to the precision punching of the tricky Trial mode combos.

Mod Nation

With a stacked roster composed of the best of both franchises, picking a team is tough but rewarding. Choosing two themed teammates (like Ryu and Ken or Asuka and Lili) adds a new dimension of personality to the Arcade mode, as our brawlers exchange banter and

Change Up Five SFXT system subtleties to keep in mind

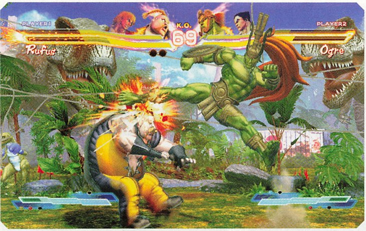
1 **Take a Hit**
Tekken's hit mechanics made the 2D jump. Attacks are high, medium, or low. Must be standing to block medium blows.

2 **Intertwined**
In true *Tekken Tag Tournament* fashion, letting one fighter's health deplete means a loss for both teammates.

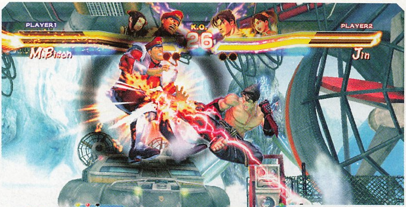
3 **Meter Made**
Assist gems are strictly for newcomers—they expend way too much meter to aid advanced players.

4 **Boxed Out**
Pandora mode is tempting whenever your brawler reaches 25 percent HP, but it's more often a suicide move than a savior.

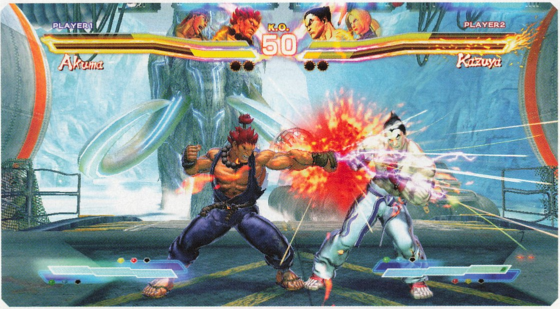
5 **Tag Attack**
Using light-medium-heavy launcher attacks stringed in quick succession is key to big damage tag-team combos.



Online play proffers the features we've come to expect from Capcom, offering ranked and casual play with improved netcode.



Comically exaggerated facial expressions let us know that every hit hurts.



bickering between matches. Each twosome even gets its own CG ending—quite impressive for a 43-character roster. With the seemingly infinite combinations of characters, this brawler's shelf life could last ages.

As if sorting through the gigantic roster wasn't enough, there are plenty of fresh fighting systems to grapple with as well. Gone are *SFIV's* Focus attacks and Ultra moves, but in their place are mechanics like the Gem system. Akin to the gear we'd equip in an RPG, gems buff up certain attributes for a limited burst of power during matches once certain conditions are met (like landing multiple special attacks or throws). This adds a layer of depth and customization that lets us craft the team that best suits our playstyle. Mixing and matching six gems (three per teammate) means even if we encounter the same duo online, the gems we've equipped will make our team's strengths and weaknesses noticeably different.

Capcom also throws a bone to those who are wowed by *SFXT's* epic matchups but haven't touched a fightstick in ages. The purple assist gems act as fisticuff training wheels, automating many of the moves that might perplex novices. With these equipped, new players can make pesky techniques like blocking and throw escapes totally hands-free. In another nod to newbies, the Quick Combo system unleashes entire attack sequences with the simple tap of two buttons—though both these and assist gems leech off the super meter. We love how these features give new players a fighting chance against their more-experienced pals but never guarantee victory.

Master Class

Fighting game pros, on the other hand, can sink their teeth into Pandora mode and Cross Rush moves, both of which play off the risk-reward fluctuations essential to the best brawling mind games. Pandora mode lets us sacrifice a near-death character in a blaze of glory, powering up his partner with a limitless super meter (and a demonic new look). Sadly, this move rarely turns the tides, as we're given mere seconds to unleash hell before an auto-KO. Nevertheless, it's a fun Hail Mary to use in moments of frantic desperation. The Cross Rush lets us swap characters mid-combo, opening a world of possibility for flashy juggles and multi-tag beatdowns.

Yoshinori Ono and the team at Capcom have done the impossible, crushing 3D fighters onto a 2D plane and making it feel coherent and supremely gratifying. Between *SFXT* and *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, it seems we've died and gone to versus-game heaven.

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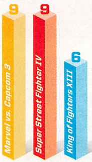
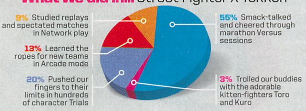
LUCAS SULLIVAN

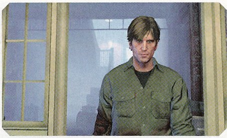


ScorePole

Personal preferences aside, *SFXT* is a game that every 2D fighting fan needs to play.

What we did in... Street Fighter X Tekken





If only Murphy could apathetically stare enemies to death...

Silent Hill Downpour

Looks like rain

The Otherworld

Welcome to the Otherworld, Silent Hill's even darker side. Random shifts pull Murphy from the real world and into this devious reflection of the town, pitting him against a swirling vortex intent on swallowing him should he fail to outrun it.

There's something to be said for a game that can still make us jump out of our seats even 13 years after its original release. Looking back, it's no surprise the *Silent Hill* series dominated the survival-horror genre with its first three titles. Unfortunately, the ever-present paranoia that raised every hair on the backs of our necks in earlier *Silent Hill* games is gone, replaced by *Downpour's* cheap scares.

A doomed prison transfer sees Murphy Pendleton—an inmate haunted by the death of his son years prior—become the newest victim of Silent Hill. Water plays a prominent role, as the title suggests. It seems to be constantly storming, and many of the buildings are flooded with at least a few inches of water. The story follows *Silent Hill's* trademark formula, never revealing more than a little at a time until the very end of the game, even keeping us in the dark about the crimes that landed Murphy in prison.

Environmental manipulations like crashing trees and disappearing doors kept us travelling in a single direction, eliminating some of the openworld feel. True, we were technically free to roam about Silent Hill, but locked or boarded up doors ensured we staid in the game's neat little box while we tried to make our escape.

Side quests scattered throughout the town attempted to open the game back up, but after fighting our way out of a labyrinth only to receive one measly first aid kit, we couldn't help but feel cheated. On top of the poor rewards, each side quest felt more out of place than the last. If the whole point of the game is for us to get the hell out of Dodge as quickly as possible, why would we care about returning items to their rightful owners? The effort required to actually locate another living person in Silent Hill far exceeds the value of the crappy rewards, though we still appreciated the game's pursuit of a lengthier experience. Players who want to stick around town a bit longer than the 6 to 8 hours of the main story have the option.

The atmosphere is occasionally a decent source of jitters: a strange DJ plays ominous music dedicated to Murphy, and the sounds of women crying and children laughing constantly surrounded us. Regrettably, some well-timed music isn't enough to save *Downpour* from being a mediocre experience. Combat never varies from enemy to enemy, and while guns and ammo are a helpful rarity, a few good melee hits are enough to take anything down. The repetitive puzzles fell flat as well. Finding codes to open doors was often the most challenging aspect in the game, and even that was just a nuisance more often than not.

Though not a terrible tribute to the series, *Downpour* seems to tone down everything we loved about the earlier games, leaving only an average shell.

ANNE LEWIS

Info

Format PS3
Pub Konami **Dev** Vatra
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a rainy day with no fun indoor activities.

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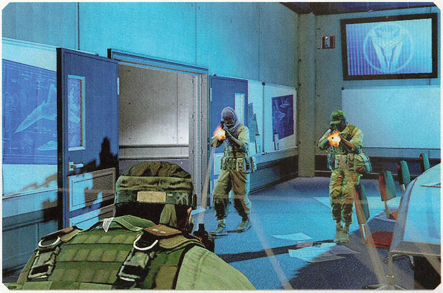
Unit 13

Pleasantly predictable

Info

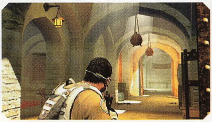
PS VITA
UNIT 13

Format PS Vita
Pub SCEA
Dev Zipper Interactive
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like every shooter we already know and love.



Eschewing a drawn-out linear story campaign in favor of short bursts of strategic run-and-gun gameplay, *Unit 13* is full of one-off missions well suited for portable play. Vita's first proper third-person shooter looks stunning, and the dual-analog sticks make smoking terrorists a fluid, intuitive process.

With a six-man team of operatives to pick from—each with unique customizable weapons loadouts and special skills, no less—blasting our way the through a broad mix of bigger multi-objective stages, shorter timed runs, and covert stealth missions proved intensely absorbing...and more than a little challenging. While not groundbreaking by any means, the predictable gun-centric fun is just the thing we're looking for to kill time when we're on-the-go.



Online co-op play and daily challenges round out *13*'s strong social gaming focus and bolster its replayability. We particularly appreciate how the skill-based scoring system rewards every combo, ranks our performance in each stage, and shares that online for friends to compete against. Much about *13* feels familiar, but considering the quality of this portable package, that's not a bad thing. NATHAN MEUNIER

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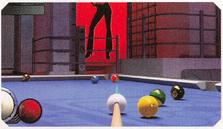

Hustle Kings

Format **PS Vita** Pub **SCEA** Dev **VooFoo Studios**
Price **$9.99 (download)** ESRB **Everyone**

To be honest, we love being able to play pool without abandoning the comfort of our couch. Even with the visual flair dialed back a touch, this faithful PS3 port looks sharp on Sony's new handheld, and the expansive career mode is loaded with challenge and ample play options. The new touch controls are well implemented, with different options for advanced and novice players, making it a cinch to plan out and tweak our shots. Cross platform competitive play on PS3 is pretty rad as well. It may not be the flashiest Vita title, but *Hustle Kings* is a perfect fix for armchair billiards enthusiasts. NATHAN MEUNIER

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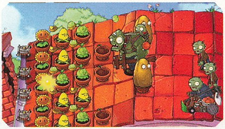

Plants vs. Zombies

Format **PS Vita** Pub **SOE** Dev **PopCap Games**
Price **$14.99 (download)** ESRB **Everyone**

For those who've been living under a rock, *Plants vs. Zombies* is an addicting, fast-paced tower defense game. Here, we must defend our homes using plants against waves of zombies. The touchscreen allows us to quickly grab and place plants as the hordes shamble in, a nice change from its PSN predecessor (though it's essentially an identical game in every other regard). Players in it for the Trophies may find the price worth it, but most will be satisfied with the version they probably already own. ANNE LEWIS

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Army Corps of Hell

Format **PS Vita** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Entersphere**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Mature**

Army Corps is *Pikmin* in hell. Dozens of little yellow goblins wielding pointy weapons form our devilish posse, and there's not much more to the boring, brown levels than chucking our minions around a bit. Anything that moves can be downed by simply flinging our army at it. Bosses offer minimal variety, with stomping attacks and, of course, glowing weak points to aim for. But despite allowing us to outfit our minions and change the color of our cape, the game won't ever trouble *Pikmin* for charm or tactical potential. JAMES COATES

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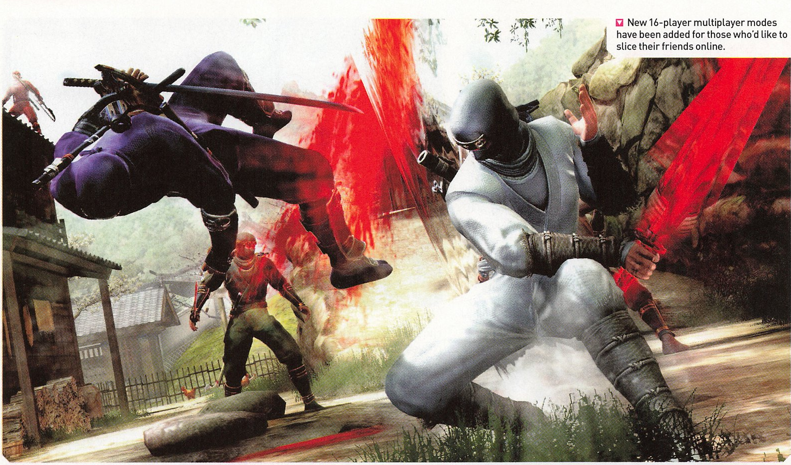


New 16-player multiplayer modes have been added for those who'd like to slice their friends online.

Ninja Gaiden 3

Ryu gets real

When Team Ninja's Tomonobu Itagaki quit Tecmo in 2008, some *Ninja Gaiden* fans worried the next installment wouldn't have that special something that's made this series so unique. Turns out those fears were utterly misplaced.

After being sent to London to deal with some terrorists, modern day ninja Ryu Hayabusa quickly learns that he's their intended target, which means he once again has to kill some soldiers, swordsmen, and anyone else who gets in his way. From the get-go, it's clear this is a more serious affair thanks to a muted color palette and noticeably lower count of gratuitous cleavage shots. It's also less arcadey. Though we still engaged in activities like shooting down a helicopter with a bow and arrow, our enemies didn't have visible health bars, nothing counted how many hits we'd landed in a row, and there's no end-of-level grading system.

Otherwise, though, it's very much a classic *Gaiden* game. Ryu still slices and dices like he works at a deli, still executes all kinds of crazy ninja acrobatics (wall running, alternate side of the wall jumping), and still traffics in the kind of bloodshed normally reserved for a Monty Python sketch about Jackson Pollack. It's also just as tough as the older games. Not only are the boss battles rough on the old thumbs, but where past *Gaiden*

Info

PS3
NINJA 3 GAIDEN

Format PS3
Pub Tecmo Koei
Dev Team Ninja
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *God of War* meets *Bayonetta*... for a talk about their relationship.

Five Fighters Our (other) favorite ninjas

AYAME
Tenchu
Because who doesn't love a beautiful badass?

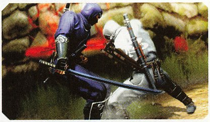
SUB-ZERO
Mortal Kombat
If we didn't include him, he'd rip out our spine.

GRAY FOX
Metal Gear Solid
He could've killed Solid Snake at any time...but didn't.

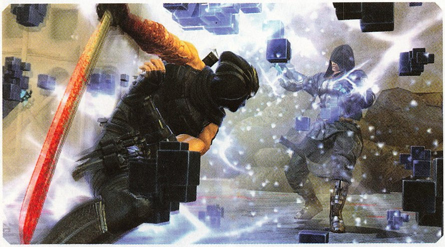
DONATELLO
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
He's the smart one in this boy band.

HIRO
Mini Ninjas
He's as aggressive as he is adorable.

▲ The muted color palette is indicative of the game's (relatively) serious tone.



▼ If the blade gets caught on an enemy's rib, just pull really hard.



games had Ryu taking on three or four guys at a time, enemy counts here stretch into double digits.

Katana-rama

This is not to say, however, that *Gaiden 3* doesn't add anything new to the formula. Besides being able to conjure a magical flaming dragon and glide down from high places like a flying squirrel, there were times when Ryu's blade got stuck in someone's ribs and we had to hit the right button to pull it out... along with all of their guts. Ryu's also suffering from a curse (or maybe it's just a bad rash) that sometimes causes him to stumble around with blurred vision but usually just lets him instantly dash from enemy to enemy, sword first. All of this makes Ryu as nimble and as much of a badass as he's ever been.

The only thing that isn't as well done as the earlier games? Ryu sometimes has trouble hitting his intended target because this has a player-controlled camera that's set waist-high and doesn't allow us to lock onto a specific enemy. But this is not a fatal flaw (usually).

Ninja Gaiden 3 isn't just a great hack-'n'-slash action game, it's a great *Ninja Gaiden* game. Bad news for Itagaki's ego, but good news for *Ninja Gaiden* fans.

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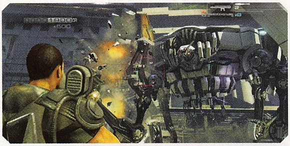
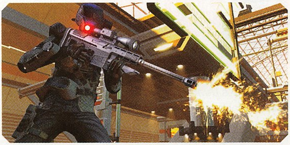
PAUL SEMEL





Binary Domain

Hearing without listening

Info

Format PS3
Pub Sega
Dev Ryu ga Gotoku Studio
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like screaming at a wall. A clever, well-made wall.

We're lying on the floor, bleeding to death. Luckily, our A.I. partner, Big Bo, is standing right next to us. "Help!" we shout into our headset, taking advantage of the game's voice control features. "I'm coming, man!" replies Bo. Doesn't move. "HELP!" We bleed out and die.

Binary Domain is a third-person shooter from the team behind the *Yakuza* series that allows us to use a headset to issue commands or talk to characters. This would be cool if only the A.I. wasn't so disastrously thick headed and the speech recognition so hit and miss. Honestly, it's easier to use the controller—then the game actually becomes (more) fun.

It's a perfectly good shooter. The weapons have a satisfying kick, the cover system is responsive, and enemies are brutally tactical. It can't match genre greats like *Vanquish*, but it's solid enough to be enjoyable. Innovation in third-person shooters is a rarity, which is why we can't help but admire *Binary Domain's* clever voice-command efforts. It's a shame the idiotic A.I. and hit-and-miss recognition spoil it, turning this into a merely "solid" shooter.

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JAMES COATES

Devil May Cry HD Collection

Dante's present is brighter than his past

Info

Format PS3 **Pub/Dev** Capcom
Price $39.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like our favorite sword-wielding demon slayer got a face lift.

Capcom's *Devil May Cry* series was *the* pioneer in style-based action games.It's fitting, then, that the three PS2 classics receive a style update in *Devil May Cry HD Collection*. This hi-def package had us itching to revisit the original trilogy.

Devil May Cry benefits most here, with a sorely needed increase in texture quality and character detail. Dante looks crisp, combat is no longer a fuzzy blur, and the environment has been cleaned up a considerable amount compared to the original. The same holds true for the other titles on the disc. Of course, muddy cinematic cutscenes and dated audio are a bit jarring in comparison, and some textures, like water, seem untouched.

Still, the hectic hack-'n'-slash action of all three holds up wonderfully, and we had a blast rediscovering the elegant, rhythmic combat of each. The disc is also packed with a full soundtrack and tons of concept art for each game (including fan art), as well as Trophy support. With so much content at our fingertips, we suspect we'll be making devils cry again for a very long time. **RYAN TALJONICK**

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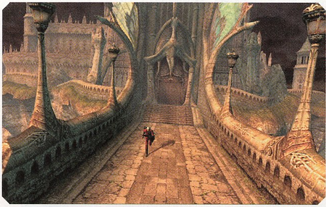
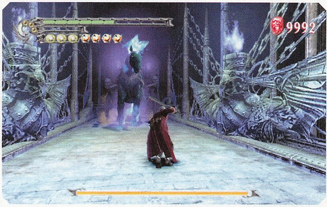
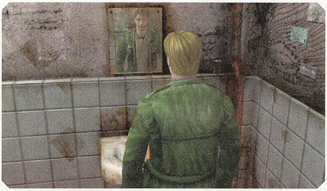
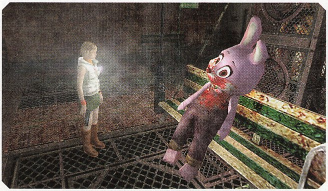


While not exactly up to par with the quality of a full-fledged PS3 game, the HD collection looks pretty incredible.







Disturbing audio effects and a mood-setting score play a big part in both games' ability to immerse us in the interactive nightmare.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Konami
Dev Hijinx Studios
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like reliving a terrifying nightmare more vividly than ever before.

Silent Hill HD Collection

Still scary after all these years

Long before survival-horror games became all about filling zombie hordes full of buckshot, the *Silent Hill* series took a subtler and often more affective approach to delivering frights. Favoring psychological scares over gore-soaked gunplay, Konami's franchise helped define this bygone genre. Sporting hi-def paint jobs, new voice work, and PSN Trophy support, *Silent Hill 2* and *3* now return to fray the nerves of fans old and new. While those who've braved the fog-choked burg before will appreciate revisiting these tweaked classics, newcomers might wonder what all the fuss is about. Both games' creepy settings, music, and emotionally-taxing narratives still spike the pulse—in fact, sharper textures and increased character and environmental details ensure they're as capable of raising a few goosebumps as ever.

However, those spoiled by this generation's tech-pushing titles will likely find the tank-like controls, frequent loadscreens, and bland presentations scarier than the monstrosities wandering the titular town's streets. Those who can overlook the aging process, though, will discover the best versions of two of the genre's greatest games. **MATT CABRAL**

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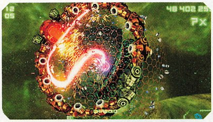
Super Stardust Delta

Format **PS Vita** Pub **SOE** Dev **Housemarque** Price **$9.99 (download)** ESRB **Everyone**



What immediately struck us about *Super Stardust Delta* was how cool it would probably look on Nintendo's 3DS. Sadly, Vita doesn't offer 3D, but it does have different strengths. Instead of rendering a hundred meteor chunks in an extra dimension, it uses raw horsepower to render *thousands*. That's the fun. We pilot a ship orbiting a planetoid. Our mission: blast the grid of asteroids and ships in slightly overlong levels using touchscreen missiles, rear touch black holes, and lasers to explode things into fireworks. As a twin-stick shooter, it's inferior to the tighter, more ingenious *Geometry Wars*, but boosting clean through a massive iceberg is ace.

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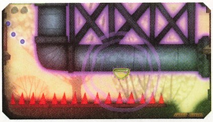
JAMES COATES

Tales From Space Mutant Blobs Attack

Format **PS Vita** Pub/Dev **Drinkbox Studios** Price **$7.99 (download)** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



Take *Katamari*, make it 2D, and base it off of 1988's *The Blob*—that's *Mutant Blobs Attack*. It's a charming (and challenging) platformer that had us navigating an amorphous blob through a series of levels while eating every last human and army tank in sight. Avoiding danger while hunting collectibles and racing to beat our friends' scores was thrilling, and plenty of cutesy humor kept us smiling. Moving platforms using the Vita's touchscreen felt natural instead of intrusive, though we did have issues with frustrating controls in levels that required us to tilt the Vita to move around. Yet for a mere $8, we highly recommend this all-you-can-eat buffet of awesome.

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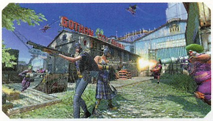
RYAN TALJONICK

Gotham City Impostors

Format **PSN** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Monolith Productions** Price **$14.99** ESRB **Teen**



Gotham City Impostors is a solid multiplayer shooter trussed up in a big, rubbery premise: one team dresses as Batman, the other as the Joker. But whichever side we bat for, our abilities remain the same, though the abilities are the one thing Monolith nails. We can choose from a grappling line, gliders, or roller skates, each of which lets us swoosh through maps tailored for aerial traversal. It's irritating to find that invisible walls block most rooftops, but the shooting is enjoyable and matches are often frantic and finely balanced, despite game modes being generic. Plus, the DIY arsenal is fun to tinker with, and there are heaps of unlockables and customization options. **JAMES COATES**

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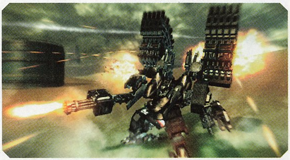

▲ Mechs can take hours to build and minutes to destroy.

Armored Core V

Mecha on mecha action

Info

PS3
V
ARMORED CORE
BANDAI

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev From Software
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the ultimate mech sim with mediocre combat.

As *Armored Core* fans will attest, this series is steeped in deep mecha customization—spending hours building the ultimate killing machine from a pool of hundreds of parts is half the fun. In this regard, *Armored Core V* sits among the best of the 14-game franchise. Yet in terms of gameplay, it feels like a step back from 2008's *For Answer*.

Despite the mechas' new, smaller stature (roughly two-thirds the size of those in previous titles), battles felt sluggish. This, compounded by muddy visuals, bland environments, and a distractingly busy HUD (and equally busy menu interface), make for a rather unremarkable experience...until the new multiplayer component is considered in the equation. We can form teams (essentially guilds or clans) and battle for territory in five-on-five skirmishes. Individual players can also register as mercenaries and be contracted out by bigger teams, participating in territorial disputes or co-op missions for pay. Battling against other teams of monstrous mechas is far more enjoyable than playing the game's boring missions, and there are tons of new multiplayer features that will keep *Core* veterans busy.

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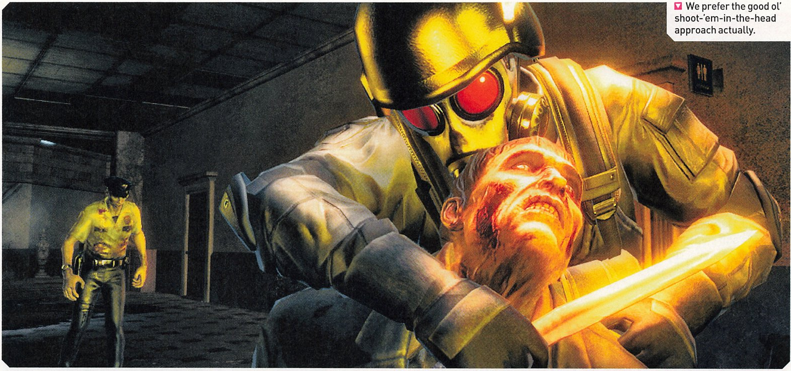
RYAN TALJONICK



We prefer the good ol' shoot-'em-in-the-head approach actually.

Resident Evil Operation Raccoon City

How about some zombies with your SOCOM?

Info

Format PS3
Pub Capcom
Dev Slant Six Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a disappointing answer to *Resident Evil* "What ifs?"

The thought of a squad-based shooter set in the *Resident Evil* universe is an exciting one, especially considering the new mechanics *Operation Raccoon City* introduces to the series. Melee combos! A cover system! And—*gasp*—the ability to move while shooting! All of these elements are integral to Slant Six's new co-op squad shooter and its frantic run-and-gun playstyle. It's a functional game that panders to series fans and even has a few surprises tucked beneath its shining layer of... mediocrity. What could possibly go wrong? Well...

Spec Flops

Raccoon City's greatest draw is its familiar setting populated by familiar characters. We play as one of six Umbrella Security Service agents charged with destroying evidence of Umbrella's involvement in various illegal activities—evidence including files, facilities, and, of course, iconic *Resident Evil* heroes like Leon Kennedy. Up to four players can play at once (three A.I. teammates are provided if no buddies are available) to take down zombies and the government-deployed spec ops troops standing in the way. Revisiting familiar locations, such as the Raccoon City Police Department and the secret underground Umbrella laboratories, is a great bit of fan service, as is encountering established characters and the many types of BOWs (Bio Organic Weapons) that scared the crap out of us in the past. Hunters, Lickers, and Tyrants all make a delightfully deadly appearance.

The six playable characters all have unique abilities that are purchased with the experience points gained from completing missions. The problem is only a handful of these abilities are actually useful in the campaign. Playing as field scientist Four Eyes allowed us to shoot BOWs and zombies with a sort of mind-control dart, temporarily turning the infected into allies. Other characters were less advantageous. Recon expert Vector, for example, uses a cloaking ability that turns him invisible. Unfortunately, attacking breaks invisibility, and because we usually had to clear an entire area of zombies to proceed, the cloak was rarely beneficial.

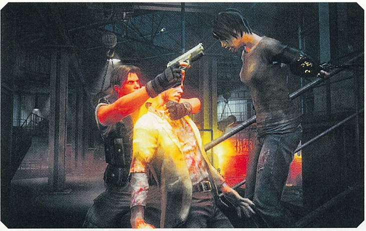
Dream Team Resident Evil: ORC's ultimate squad lineup

Lupo Has incendiary ammo for extra damage.

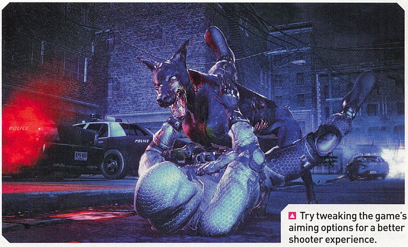
Four Eyes Can turn BOWs into allies.

Bertha Has a damage reduction ability.

Beltway Has access to heavy explosives.



Taking heavy fire? Grab a zombie as a human...er, zombie shield. Hopefully it's not an arm biter—word on the street is zombie bites are bad news.



Try tweaking the game's aiming options for a better shooter experience.

To make matters worse, our teammates' A.I. was abysmal (we *highly* recommend playing with friends if possible). We watched in horror when our allies walked into walls or ran with feverish excitement toward grenades thrown by enemies. Even the A.I. of human foes was questionable, as spec ops soldiers occasionally ran toward us while spraying bullets into the ground as if the cement had somehow insulted them on a deeply personal level.

Surprisingly, what *should* be *Raccoon City's* strongest mechanic—the shooting—is one of its weakest points. The weapons sound unimpressive and are alarmingly inaccurate, even when standing still. This is largely because accuracy depends not on where we aim our reticule but on where a gun's laser sight falls, which means headshots require more luck than skill. This became especially problematic in fights with powerful BOWs that had small, specific weak spots. It's difficult to shoot a charging Tyrant in the face (its only vulnerability) when we landed one out of every six shots.

Zombie Olympics

Still, *Raccoon City* has some fun moments despite its sloppy presentation, especially when playing with friends. There are levels that are genuinely intense, pitting us against seemingly endless waves of zombies without endless supplies of ammunition. (Sometimes zombie spawns *were* endless. We could rarely discern when we were supposed to kill everything in the area or just run to the next checkpoint to bypass them.) Slant Six even included some interesting mechanics that add a layer of unpredictability to our skirmishes. Shooting human enemies could cause them to bleed out, attracting nearby infected, and we could even become infected ourselves after too many zombie bites.

A host of competitive multiplayer modes add a little bit of flavor to the mix as well, including team deathmatch, a capture-the-flag-type mode, and a single kill elimination mode. To make things more interesting, zombies and BOWs populate each game type, hindering both teams. While these competitive modes were fun for a while, the novelty didn't last long. Even the "Kill Leon" premise of the single-player campaign lost its appeal thanks to the jarring final sequence, which ended in a bizarre twist that occurred out of the blue. By the time we finished *Raccoon City* (the campaign takes five to six hours to complete), one word summarized our experience: meh. It's a functional squad shooter, but it's one that's probably best suited for series diehards.

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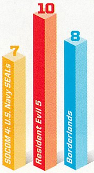
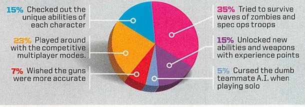
RYAN TALJONICK

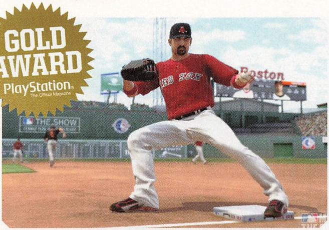


ScorePole
In a shooter-saturated market, *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* is rather...unremarkable.

What we did in... RE: Operation Raccoon City



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine



We're not sure if *MLB 12* cover star Adrian Gonzalez had any extra pull with the devs, but that's a pretty dramatic pose for a routine play...

MLB 12 The Show

Another winning season

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** SCEA
Dev San Diego Studio
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like the best baseball sim knocks it out of the park again.

San Diego Studio's consistency in producing the most complete baseball simulation on the market appears unblemished for yet another year, and with tweaks to the batter/pitcher mechanics and revamped commentary, *MLB 12: The Show* still feels like a fresh experience.

The new pulse pitching mechanic factors in difficulty level, pitcher confidence, and player skill to target the pitch when the circular window is at its smallest. It works very well, throwing in enough variation to ensure even aces don't hit every spot every time. That's matched by a new analog batting system that, unfortunately, still doesn't quite get it right. While ball physics adjustments appear to add more variety to hits (and more singles, it seemed), it's still a little sluggish. But the standard system is still available.

Really, though, *The Show* is all about the modes. Road to the Show in particular is much less of a grind now. We get to be a starter rather than having to fight through levels of minor league ball to gain a promotion to the Majors. Multiplayer games can still be incredibly tense pitching duels, and improved base-running looks to have removed some of the cheap steals that were possible before. And just making contact with the ball using the new analog swing system feels rewarding since pitchers generally seem to have the upper hand. But isn't that always the case with those multi-million dollar aces?

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ALEX JOHNSON

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13

For swingers

Rickie Fowler earning equal title-screen billing with Tiger? We can see where this is heading. But whatever the brand strategies, the gameplay has received a makeover that creates a fresh challenge for series veterans, even if the core functions remain largely unchanged.

An overhauled swing meter measures tempo as well as direction and execution with the analog-stick controls. It doesn't impact drives so much, but iron shots—and particularly the short game and putting—feel very different and require care at every stage of the seemingly simple pull-back and push-forward process. Additional fine-tuning in our character's stance and ball striking add even greater depth (and challenge).

Other features like the new coin system—used to upgrade our career golfer or unlock additional courses—require being logged into EA's servers. That just seems unnecessary. At least the Tiger Legacy mode—which profiles his rise from toddler to champion—adds a unique, worthwhile twist.

Unfortunately, a few surprising glitches undermined the volume of content. Even in Tiger Legacy a couple of odd camera angles masked the important events. *PGA Tour 13* is most certainly a complete golf sim package, but the additions merely refine rather than shine. If you skipped *12*, then it's definitely worth reinvesting in the franchise, but it's clearly a product in flux, hanging on the reborn potential of its titular star. ALEX JOHNSON

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Info

Format PS3
Pub EA Sports
Dev EA Tiburon
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like adding a few new clubs while playing the same 18 holes.

Blades of Time

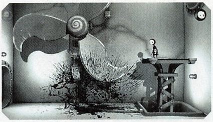
Format **PS3** Pub **Konami** Dev **Gaijin Entertainment** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Mature**

Compared to its shoddy spiritual successor *X-Blades, Blades of Time* is a functional improvement. Scantily clad heroine Ayumi has ditched her original anime-inspired look in favor of a more conventional presentation, but she's essentially a blond Lara Croft knockoff who displays more skin to compensate for a lack of personality. The hack-'n'-slash gameplay offers a few interesting wrinkles thanks to a tiered attack system, some spell casting variety, and a time-shift mechanic. The intense melees can be entertaining but the combat ultimately becomes a grind rather than a pleasure. Still, for a budget title, *Time* did manage to keep our attention longer than we anticipated. **ROGER BURCHILL**

PlayStation **6**

Escape Plan

Format **PS Vita** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Fun Bits Interactive** Price **$14.99 (download)** ESRB **Teen**

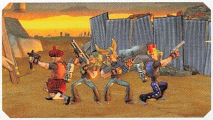


Escape Plan is one of Vita's more leftfield launch titles—a point-and-click monochrome curio from an untested developer that uses just two colors and a bizarre mix of classical backing music and sitcom-style laughter/clapping tracks. Yet somehow it works, giving odd character to a game with, well, odd characters. Players must help Lil and Laarg escape through booby-trapped rooms that use all of Vita's control interfaces. In one, we tilted our Vita to maneuver the helium-inflated duo, while in another we knocked away platforms with the touchpad. If the controls were completely reliable rather than "reliable most of the time," *Escape Plan* could've been a classic. **JAMES COATES**

PlayStation **7**

Shoot Many Robots

Format **PSN** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Demiurge Studios** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**



Shoot Many Robots is mindless sidescrolling shoot-'em-up fun...for about 15 minutes at a time. Fortunately, levels are fast-paced and present interesting and occasionally overwhelming challenges. The game may lose its charm after a few rounds, but *Shoot Many Robots* is still a great game to break out when we have friends over and feel like, well, shooting the crap out of robots. Its assortment of weapons and apparel—all of which possess unique bonuses to damage, speed, and more—is impressive and often leads to hilarious character customization. Like weight lifting, the robot apocalypse is best when faced a little at a time and always with a spotter. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation **7**

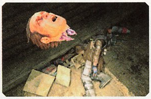
DLC Roundup

ModNation Racers: Road Trip

Unlock All Code

Price **$5.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Who says cheaters never prosper? Not us. For that all-important moment when tinkering with items, tracks, racers, and customizable goodies takes precedence, this "unlock all" code is a godsend. While *ModNation's* racing is cool, we appreciate the devs indulging in our impatience.



NeverDead

Expansion Pack 1

Price **$3.99** ESRB **Mature**

We get a kick out of seeing perky pop idol Nikki Summerfield packing heat as a playable character in *NeverDead's* online multiplayer matches, but this DLC also adds three new gameplay modes to explore in the Asylum level, including a hunt for collectibles, racing, and an arena battle.

Download of the Month

Saints Row: The Third

Gangstas In Space

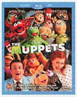
Price **$6.99** ESRB **Mature**

The nerdy Force is definitely strong with this one as the city of Steelport transforms into a goofy sci-fi B-movie set complete with killable camera crews and absurd props. We battle invaders from beyond and let the one-liners fly while we're being filmed tackling inventive missions around the city. Don't forget to smile for the camera between blasts of mayhem.

The Muppets

It's time to play the music, it's time to light the lights...

Info



Price $39.99
Creators Jim Henson, Jason Segal, James Bobin, Nicholas Stoller
Starring Jason Segal, Amy Adams, Chris Cooper
Rated PG
Extras A variety of background and making-of shorts, deleted scenes, commentary.

For those who grew up in the late '70s and '80s, the Muppets were likely a beloved weekly TV fixture. Unfortunately, Jim Henson's brilliant motley crew of crazy, charming, and sometimes outright deranged puppets haven't managed anywhere near that level of success in the intervening decades. Clearly, Jason Segal (*How I Met Your Mother*) remembers them, though. He co-wrote and stars in this movie, and his affection for the subject matter shines though.

The Muppets is an odd bird for demographics though. Segal is reliving his childhood nostalgia here from a very adult perspective. So while there are plenty of familiar, kid-friendly Muppet shenanigans, the movie is working overtime to appeal to the adults who grew up on the show.

Indeed, the whole theme of the movie is adapting to the passing of time long after fame and relevancy have passed the Muppets by. Kermit is lonely and single in a giant, disused mansion; Fozzie is doing embarrassing lounge performances in Reno; Gonzo is a plumbing magnate; Animal is in anger-management treatment; and Piggy...well, she went to France and became a plus-sized editor for a famous women's magazine.

It's a great, bizarre sight to see so many (and generally depressing) adult problems translated to Muppet terms, and there's no shortage of humorous celebrity cameos to round out the visuals. The main story focuses on Segal as a man-child who takes his long-beleaguered girlfriend (Amy Adams) on a vacation to LA with his Muppet brother, who is understandably obsessed with Kermit and the Muppets.

Once there, the trio runs afoul of a plot to tear down the old Muppet studios so an evil oil baron can drill the spot for oil. It's as logical a plot as any for a movie about living puppets, but Chris Cooper as the robber baron is amusingly comfortable working with intentionally overdone bad guy clichés. His gangster rap sequence about being rich is particularly memorable.

From a kid's perspective, the movie lingers a bit too much at times on the human elements of the story, but the musical numbers are great, and the humor is mostly consistent, constant, and effective. Disney didn't skimp on the rest of the disc either. Aside from commentary and tons of extras, the Blu-ray even plays intermission gags when the movie is paused.

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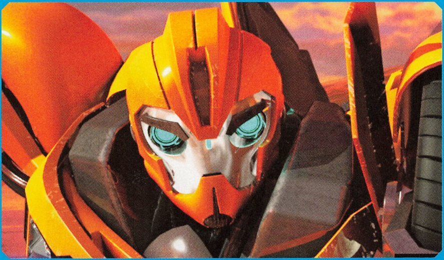
JASON D'APRILE



Transformers Prime Season One

Autobots... Roll out!

More discerning *Transformer* fans should find plenty to like in this season one release of the Hub TV Network's *Transformers Prime*. The show might have ties to the awful movies, but it's actually surprisingly enjoyable. The premise revolves around the handful of surviving 'bots on both sides, who are now stuck on Earth, but still engaging in a covert war with each other.

Optimus Prime—with long-time voice actor, Peter Cullen, still providing his calm and frequently cheesy-Zen dialogue—leads just three Autobots now. The Decepticons are mostly lead by a humorously absurd and crazy Starscream, who remains dangerously megalomaniacal and incompetent. He's a clownish foil to the more serious evil of Megatron. The series opens with a bang in a five-part storyline that actually throws in zombie robots, thanks to a plot by Megatron to use dark energon to reanimate the corpses of fallen Transformers.

The rest of the 26 episodes don't break any new ground, but the show is fun and looks superb. The computer-generated, vaguely anime-inspired character models are well animated. The back-grounds are sparse on the whole, but this serves to keep the viewer's attention on the foreground action. Some of the fight sequences are remarkably creative, with interesting effects and camera angles thrown in.

Granted, to completely enjoy the cartoonish action, logic needs to frequently take a backseat. There are plenty of nonsensical uses of computers and hacking, and scientific thought is generally thrown completely to the wind. The three pre-requisite kids aren't exactly deep, thought-out characters, but are tolerable enough for older viewers.

Idle complaints aside, Shout! Entertainment has made a great four-disc box set. The HD transfer is excellent, the episodes have lively commentary, and there's even a beefy prequel graphic novel from IDW. Oddly, the episodes lack captioning, which is a strange oversight. Flaws and all, this is an entertaining return to dramatic form for the Transformers and worth checking out. JD

PlayStation The Official Magazine **7**

Info

Price $64.99 **Creators** Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci
Starring Peter Cullen, Sumalee Montano, Frank Welker
Rated Not Rated
Extras Graphic novel, episode commentary.

Blu-ray Roundup

War Horse

Price $39.99 **Rated** PG-13

Spielberg has already proven his mettle with wartime drama and could have made a spectacular movie around the horrors of World War I. Unfortunately, *War Horse* is a bit on the dull side, as this aimless and frequently pointless story only follows an uninteresting horse around Allied and Axis fronts. **5**

Griff the Invisible

Price $29.95 **Rated** PG-13

Quaint and darkly funny, this Australian import is worth checking for fans of indie super hero stuff. Its slow focus on the socially awkward, disconnected Griff is interesting, yet ultimately feels just a bit too uneven and unfocused to be completely satisfying. **6**

BEWARE CRIME

Super

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

Violent and tragic, but full of great dark humor, *Super* isn't an easy movie to watch. It is, however, a slick and smart statement on mental illness and the superhero genre, with some surprising depth of character and an insightful ending that's definitely worth seeing. **7**

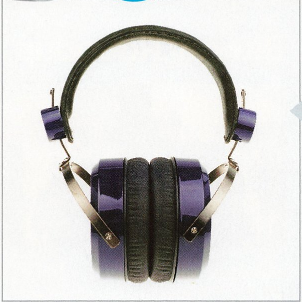
Mandrill

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

An amusing South American take on badass exploitation-film characters with plenty of Telemundo-level soup operatics, *Mandrill* will delight fans of the grind house genre. Action scenes are impressive, and there's a sly cinematic undertone. **7**

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people



HiFiMAN HE-400

Comfortable and solidly constructed, these audiophile-grade headphones offer high-end performance for a mid-range price. The planar magnetic drivers have larger diaphragms than dynamic and electrostatic drivers for better accuracy and low-end response.

$399

hifiman.com

Lytro Light Field Camera

An attempt to flip the photography world on its head, Lytro uses a matrix of tiny lenses on its sensor that lets users change the focus *after* a picture is taken. Because there's no focusing, shots fire with no lag.

$399-$499

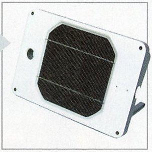
lytro.com

Solar Joos Orange

This solar charger can bring a dead iPhone back to 100 percent after less than an hour of direct sunlight. Eight hours of decent light will fill the unit's battery, and collapsible stilts always ensure a proper angle. Oh, and the tough-as-nails design means it's bag chuckable.

$150

solarjoos.com



Nike+ Fuelband

This personal fitness tracker from the future adds up steps, calories, and time spent in motion throughout the entire day, and then relays that information back to a smartphone. The result is a personal digital assistant, complete with a colorful LED display.

$150

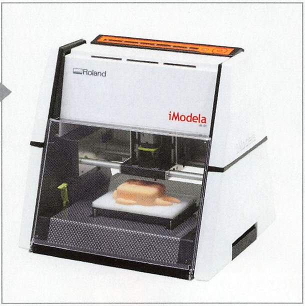
nike.com/fuelband

iModela

In this age of DIY, Roland has devised a digital hobby mill that can carve 3D shapes, jewelry, textures, and prototypes out of balsa wood, foam, modeling wax, and various plastics. Projects need to be small, but the iModela comes with everything needed to get making.

$899

rolanddga.com



Incase DSLR Pro Pack

This backpack has a large main compartment with fully customizable dividers to safely house all manner of camera gear. A second zipper provides instant access for fast equipment changes.

$150

goincase.com

For **Juri**, the big letter on the box is a good start. But sometimes she wants to know more about the games **Sean** and **Maia** want to play. And now she can, **right from her phone**, right from the store.

You can do the same thing with **ESRB's free mobile app.**

Learn more at **ESRB.org/mobile**.

Juri P

Lakeside, CA

ESRB ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD · EVERYONE · EVERYONE 10+ · TEEN · MATURE 17+ · ADULTS ONLY 18+ · CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

mail@ptom

Ryan Taljonick and Superman fight back against mandatory updates in this month's letters!

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, Future US, 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
PlayStation The Official Magazine
V-DAY! PS Vita Launch Guide
TROPHIES Platinum in less than 10 hours
Building a better shooter
STARHAWK
Warhawk's successor takes the battle to the stars
REVIEWED Kingdoms of Amalur SoulCalibur V NFL Blitz NeverDead
ZOMBIES AND CHEERLEADERS? We ♥ Lollipop Chainsaw!
GOD OF WAR IV? SOUTH PARK GHOST RECON GAME OF THRONES

In the event that glowing blue eyes last for more than four hours, please consult a physician.

Mea Culpa

An article in the March issue used transphobic hate speech when covering *Street Fighter X Tekken*. *[The offending speech will not be reprinted here.—Ed.]* I was very surprised this slipped past the editing process. I understand that this is meant to be in the spirit of trash talking, but if sexist and racist slurs would be unprofessional to publish, I believe the same applies to transphobic language. Any public support for your transgender subscribers and confirmation that transphobic hate speech is unprofessional and unwanted would be extremely appreciated. **MATTIE BRICE** THE INTERNET

"Mattie and I have had a prolonged and productive exchange regarding this occurrence via email, but it is my desire to publicly apologize to transgender gamers and anyone who may have been offended by the passage in our March issue feature. Although no malice was intended, the words we used were thoughtless and ignorant. PTOM and I have always believed that the gaming community should be an inclusive one that celebrates all our unique differences and attributes. In this case, we marginalized people who face enough challenges in their daily lives for the sake of an ill-considered attempt at humor. We're sorry for our failure and it will not happen again." —Roger Burchill

What's Old is New Again

I have been an avid PlayStation gamer since I was seven years old. My whole life has been devoted to PlayStation and everything Sony. I have owned almost every single PlayStation console. I absolutely love the games for both PSone and PS2 consoles and was hurt when I found that the PS3 does not ensure backwards compatibility. I am in love with the new games, but it is a hassle switching off between consoles and having to connect and disconnect cables. Is there any way the PTOM staff can help me in my cry for help and bring back backwards compatibility as a software update or something? **CESAR** THE INTERENET

Wait...what? Did this letter get beamed here from 2006? Was it lost in a snow

Out With the Old

So I have a collection of PTOM issues. The problem is, every time the magazine pile gets too big, my girlfriend says, "Do you have to keep all of them?" So I say, "No, I guess not." However, sometimes I will be looking at an older game and wonder, "Hmm, what did PTOM say about this game..." But because my GF made me throw out that magazine issue, I can't just look it up and read it. Is there a way of looking online at your older reviews? **ADROCK** THE INTERNET

At the moment, no. But we're working on it. In the meantime, just hang on to those old issues, man! Relationships come and go, but videogames are forever.

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
PlayStation The Official Magazine
REVIEWED Final Fantasy Fate/Extra Oddworld
2011 GAME OF THE YEAR! AWARDS
HIGHWAY TO HELL
TWISTED METAL
Strategies, vehicles, maps revealed!
Hideo Kojima on Metal Gear's past, present, and future
PROTOTYPE 2 DEAD OR ALIVE THE LAST OF US SILENT HILL

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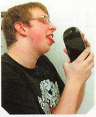
bank somewhere only to be delivered six years too late? Sorry Cesar, but we've already fought this battle...and lost. The best you can do is try to track down a first generation PS3 console on eBay.*

You Know You Love It

Do you have a pic of your intern licking a Vita like [Jessica] Chobot from IGN?

KYLE O THE INTERNET

No, but we do have this very handsome photo of Ryan licking a PS Vita!



PlayStation Patience

Here is my stance on the March issue's debate on the PS4. I'm sorry Scott, but I side with Ryan on this one. Showing off of the PS4 at E3 would be premature, and a two to three year wait after an unveiling would kill me. Overall, I think that rushing the developers and overshadowing the release of one of the coolest handhelds ever would be a bad idea—especially because I would put so much hope into something I won't touch for another two years.

ALEX CALIFORNIA

Black Listed

How can your mag have *Skyrim* on the PS3 Essentials list? Games with bugs, glitches, and frame rate/freezing problems are a big waste of gamers' precious time. This addition to your list was made before the latest patch was even released and evaluated. Also, in the March issue, number seven of the Big 10 was a question about if *Skyrim* would be fixed on the PS3. In this age of information and misinformation, gamers just want the truth. Gamers also just want good games that are not broken. Did Bethesda not even test *Skyrim* on the PS3? How about free DLC content for the PS3 gamers?

DON THE INTERNET

Here's what it comes down to for us: Skyrim *is an amazing experience, period. True, it's deeply troubling that Bethesda knowingly released a glitchy product—that's why we've continued to cover the issue with stories like the one you mention. This is not something we intend to ignore or sugarcoat. Never the less, for the majority of gamers who have not encountered serious problems,* Skyrim *offers one of the most compelling interactive experiences on the market today. Give it a try.*

Update or Downtime?

It's so annoying that no matter how old or new a game is, there's always an update waiting right after I pop it on. It's like getting all excited to go swimming when Jaws creeps up on you. All I can do is read the two-page manual when all I *want* to do is play the damn game! After all the hectic updates, I usually spend another hour sitting through more damn cinematic movies and slow tutorials. Ugh!

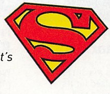
CHRISTIAN KENNY CONNECTICUT

We've started playing our Vitas during mandatory PS3 updates. No joke. We dread the day when both systems need to update at the same time.

Superfan

I was wondering if there will ever be a great or even decent Superman game produced for the *millions* of Superman fans out there. With the incredible success of the recent Batman games, I can't help but wonder, "Would it be possible? Is one already in the works?" Maybe the team behind *Batman: Arkham City* could do it justice? Someone, please! Every other Superman game ever made was awful! I see big money for whoever makes this happen.

BRAD THE INTERNET



We haven't heard anything about a potential Superman game, Brad, but that's not to say it'll never happen. Now that Rocksteady Studios has shown the world what a superhero game can be, it shouldn't be too hard for other developers to follow their example. In the meantime, just play Asura's Wrath *and pretend Asura is Superman.*

Ask Roger

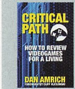
Q The Vita needs a feature to video chat with the PS3 using 3G. I work nights, and this simple addition could improve the lives of my kids and my wife, allowing me to exist in their world in a way I can't now. Homework, play, bedtime stories, security, and plenty more—I need it, I want it, I'll buy it and sing its praises. Can Sony deliver this dream for me?

TURBYNEWHYNE
THE INTERNET

A They can and, in all likelihood, they will. Skype is coming to PS Vita, although it's unclear whether it will be voice-only or with video. If Skype doesn't deliver on the video end, hopefully a mobile app like Tango will step in to fill the void.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM



Critical Path

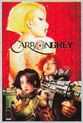
"'How do I get *your* job?' It's a question I'm often asked, but now I can just point people to my buddy Dan Amrich's new book that's packed with sage advice. Thanks, Dan, I really needed more competition."

ROGER BURCHILL

Laser Time Podcast

"Hilarious, offensive, and free, Laser Time warps its listeners through a surreal wormhole of every nerdy subject imaginable, from games to comics to commercials. Check it out at lasertimepodcast.com!"

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



Carbon Grey

"Image Comics' impressive new addition had me falling over myself the second I saw its cover. The gorgeous art by Khari Evans is as breathtakingly beautiful as it is bloody."

ANNE LEWIS

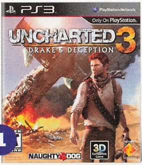
Kindle Fire

"There was a time when I swore I'd never use an e-reader—until I realized I could store thousands of books, watch movies, and browse the web on a single device. Plus, I *think* you can use it to start fires!"

RYAN TALJONICK

PS3 Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games



1

Cliffhanging Action

Uncharted 3
Drake's Deception

A PS3 essentials collection without *Uncharted* is like a life without air. This love child of Lara Croft and Indiana Jones is a deft blend of storytelling, memorable characters, and action gameplay.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**

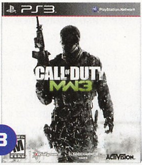
2

Acts of Vengeance

God of War III

Huge beautiful battlegrounds and brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes: we expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**



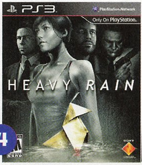
3

First-Person Shooter

Call of Duty
Modern Warfare 3

Keeping up with the modern combat Jones' and the franchise's sterling history isn't easy, but *MW3* offers new and improved multiplayer modes and an epic conclusion to the trilogy's storyline.

9
Pub **Activision**
Dev **Infinity Ward**



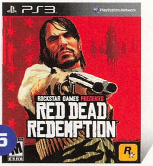
4

Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, *Heavy Rain* is one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep you guessing until it's solved... or until the heroes die in the process.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**



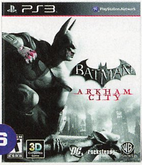
5

Open-World Shooter

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing with its record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and fabulous characters.

10
Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**



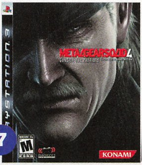
6

Action Adventure

Batman
Arkham City

PTOM's 2011 PS3 Game of the Year, *Arkham City* presents us with a deliciously realized open world—even more reason to fall in love with Gotham's dark underbelly and its determined protector.

10
Pub **Warner Bros. Int.**
Dev **Rocksteady**



7

Stealth Action

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10
Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**

8

First-Person Shooter

Killzone 3

War isn't pretty—unless you're playing *Killzone 3*. But the latest clash between the ISA and Helghast ventures beyond great graphics with improvements to combat, storyline, and multiplayer that propel it to the FPS genre's top ranks.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**

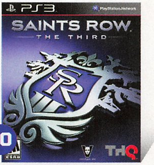
9

Fighter

Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10
Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**



10

Sandbox Shooter

Saints Row
The Third

Saints Row is for those who want more Cat Men and exploding octopi in their games. Loaded with whacky side quests and a story that kept us fascinated, *The Third* is good ol' dirty fun.

10
Pub **THQ**
Dev **Volition**

Team Choice

Twisted Metal

"When it comes to pure gameplay, few can compare to *Metal's* fast, frenetic brand of vehicular mayhem. It seems pure arcade on the surface, but under the hood there's tons of on-the-fly strategizing required. Early snafus marred online play, but the multiplayer is now addictive."

Roger Burchill
Editor in Chief

Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

PS3
INCLUDES 6+ HOURS OF BONUS MISSIONS
MASS EFFECT 2

11

Role-Playing Shooter

Mass Effect 2

Mass Effect 2 features a spectacular story wrought with intense action and game-changing decisions, and the PS3 version of BioWare's third-person shooter/RPG is the franchise's best. Bring on *Mass Effect 3*!

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**

PS3
PlayStation Move
Only On PlayStation
LittleBigPlanet 2

12

Platformer

LittleBigPlanet 2

Oh Sackboy, how we love thee. The biggest little game on PS3 is rocking our worlds with its sequel. The standard in-game fare is excellent, but it's the ingenious levels crafted by the the fan community that truly amaze and delight.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

PS3
FINAL FANTASY XIII
SQUARE ENIX

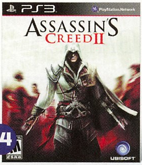
13

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XIII

It takes a bit of a commitment and the gameplay is more linear in this outing, but the gorgeous visuals, crazy deep combat, and oh yes, the lovely heroine Lightning, make this RPG more than worth getting into, and through.

10 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**


PS3
ASSASSIN'S CREED II
UBISOFT

14

Stealth Adventure

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not quite have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the best parkour-influenced stealth game of all time. It doesn't hurt that it's awfully pretty in action either.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

PS3
PORTAL 2
VALVE

15

First-Person Puzzler

Portal 2

Valve's insidiously creative puzzle adventure twists our perception of reality and tosses it through gateways we shoot into its walls. If your brain starts hurting, invite a friend—co-op adds a "hole" other dimension to gameplay.

9 Pub **Valve / EA**
Dev **Valve**

PS3
NEED FOR SPEED HOT PURSUIT
Criterion

16

Driving

Need for Speed
Hot Pursuit

The high-speed pursuits from the good old days are back and they look better than ever. Race the cops or join them, but the cars are hot either way so don't let that sway which side of the law to select.

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**

PLAYSTATION 3
BIOSHOCK
2K GAMES

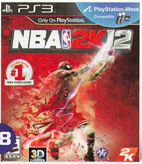
17

First-Person Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**


PS3
PlayStation Move
Only On PlayStation
NBA 2K12
#1
3D
2K

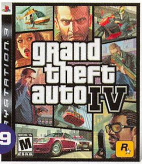
18

Sport

NBA 2K12

Basketball has always trailed behind other sports in its videogame translation. Not anymore. 2K Sports' franchise has reached true baller status with its gorgeous, feature-rich hoops experience—even down to the players' tattoos.

10 Pub **2K Sports**
Dev **Visual Concepts**


PLAYSTATION 3
grand theft auto IV

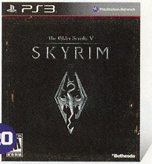
19

Open-World Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

There's a reason why *GTA* sells like crazy. This open-world gangster game is one of the most incredible achievements that the videogame medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure. Just plain great.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**


PS3
The Elder Scrolls V
SKYRIM
Bethesda

20

Role-Playing Game

The Elder Scrolls V
Skyrim

The vast world presented in *Skyrim* offers hundreds of hours of immersive exploration and adventure. It's an intelligent RPG with gorgeous, intense action. Plus, dragons.

10 Pub **Bethesda**
Dev **Bethesda**

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

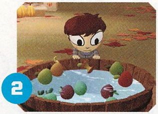
1

Creepy Crawly Platformer

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. The game melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated about it.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**



2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

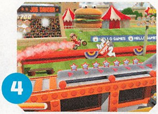
3

Frightening Lightning

inFamous Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? (groan) Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**



4

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

6

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien and rock blasting galore, ihe fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our mind and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

7

Role-playing Puzzler

Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes* with its throwback 2D visuals and turn-based battle system—the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**

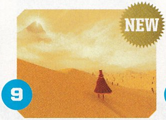
8

Hardcore brawler

Street Fighter III Third Strike Online

This perfect port of the legendary 1997 arcade game features all new netcode that virtually eliminates lag. *Third Strike*'s deep, demanding mechanics have earned it a diehard following. It deserves to be rediscovered and celebrated.

9 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom/Iron Galaxy**



9

We Are Not Alone

Journey

The hauntingly beautiful and atmospheric *Journey* has us wandering a desert to reach a distant mountain. Along the way, we may or may not encounter and wordlessly communicate with fellow travelers who can aid us in our quest. Is this a game or a metaphor for life?

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

10

Dolled-Up Adventure

Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era-esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

"Mission accomplished!"

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Unlimited in Canada

This should come as music to our northern neighbors' ears: The Music Unlimited service is now available in Canada. The Music Unlimited Premium trial app can turn a PS3 into the ultimate jukebox with a catalog of millions of albums and songs, or simply sit back and enjoy the service's Channels with no annoying ads and no song-skip limit. The Music Unlimited service is also compatible with a range of devices including Android phones, Sony tablets, and any PC. Go to munlimited.com to try it free for 30 days.

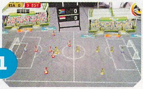
Music Unlimited

Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol

ETA **April 17** Rated **PG-13** Genre **Action/Adventure** Studio **Paramount Pictures**

Two things come to mind when we think of Tom Cruise: the enthusiasm with which he jumps on Oprah's couch, and his innate ability to fight people to the death. While we find the former rather puzzling, the latter is exciting—so naturally we're pumped that Cruise is back in another action-packed adventure full of explosions, badass hot ladies, and impossibly choreographed fistfights. *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* is a non-stop action flick that won't disappoint, even if Tommy doesn't do a whole lot of couch jumping.

BEST FREE STUFF



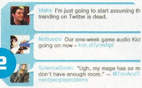
1

Quite a Feet

Table Soccer
AR game

Turning any flat surface into an impromptu soccer stadium, this turn-based virtual soccer game delivers the fun either solo or with a pal. Be sure to keep catzilla off the pitch.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Four Door Lemon**



blake I'm just going to start assuming th
trending on Twitter is dead.

Nobuooo Our one-week game audio Kic
going on now - kck.st/ycmNpl

ScienceGroen "Ugh, my mage has so m
don't have enough room." -- @TrinAndT
nerdpeopleproblems

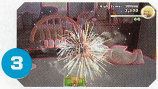
2

Vita Tweetah

LiveTweet

Just kick some serious butt in a favorite Vita game? This handy Twitter app lets us tweet moments of glory, share random thoughts, or simply keep up with what our peeps are doing.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCEA**



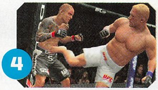
3

Blow On the Go

Fireworks
AR game

Casual fun with volatile explosives is a tough combination to pass up. Vita's *Fireworks* tests our finger reflexes while transforming any room into a dazzling display of colorful explosions.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Exient**



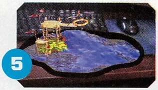
4

Flooring It

UFC Undisputed 3
Ultimate Fights Rivals Pack

Hop into some of UFC's most famous real-life showdowns in this free expansion pack. Face smashing fun at its finest.

Pub **THQ**
Dev **Yuke's**



5

Setting the Dive Bar

Cliff Diver
AR game

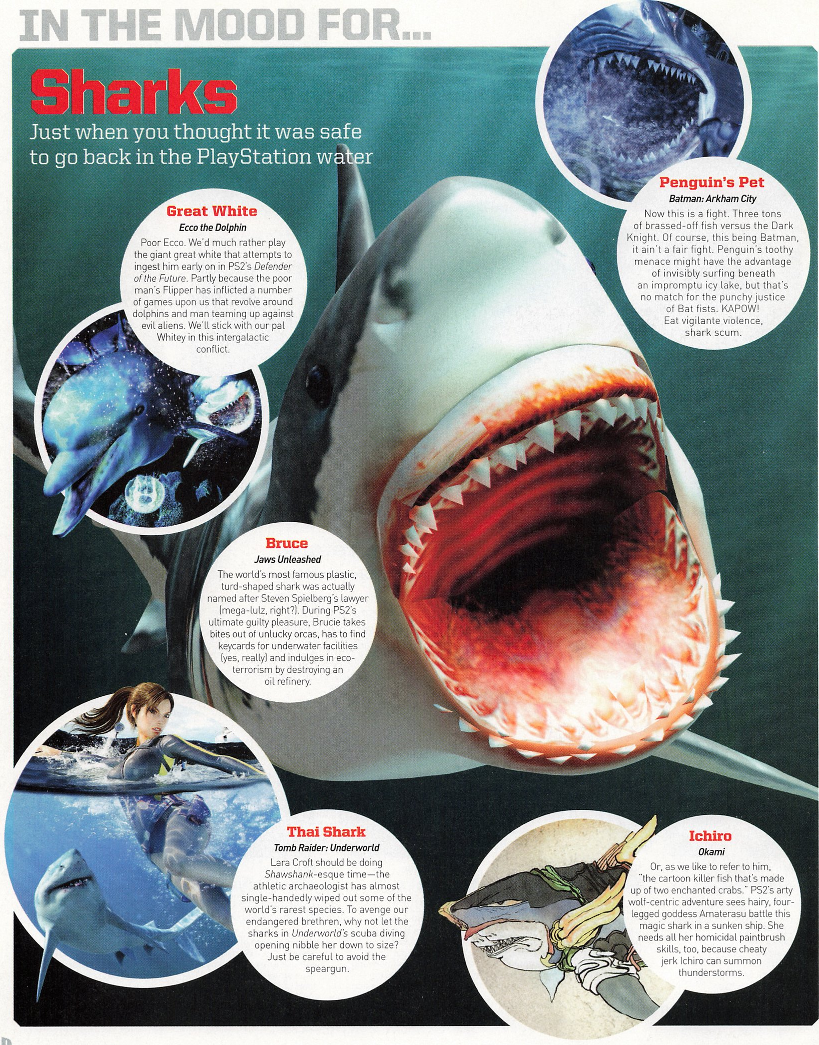
Dan is a real daring dude, and we got a chuckle out of watching him dive off of random objects around the office, like keyboards and piles of paperwork, in this unusual Vita game.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Spiral House**

IN THE MOOD FOR...

Sharks

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the PlayStation water



Great White

Ecco the Dolphin

Poor Ecco. We'd much rather play the giant great white that attempts to ingest him early on in PS2's *Defender of the Future*. Partly because the poor man's Flipper has inflicted a number of games upon us that revolve around dolphins and man teaming up against evil aliens. We'll stick with our pal Whitey in this intergalactic conflict.

Penguin's Pet

Batman: Arkham City

Now this is a fight. Three tons of brassed-off fish versus the Dark Knight. Of course, this being Batman, it ain't a fair fight. Penguin's toothy menace might have the advantage of invisibly surfing beneath an impromptu icy lake, but that's no match for the punchy justice of Bat fists. KAPOW! Eat vigilante violence, shark scum.

Bruce

Jaws Unleashed

The world's most famous plastic, turd-shaped shark was actually named after Steven Spielberg's lawyer (mega-lulz, right?). During PS2's ultimate guilty pleasure, Brucie takes bites out of unlucky orcas, has to find keycards for underwater facilities (yes, really) and indulges in eco-terrorism by destroying an oil refinery.

Thai Shark

Tomb Raider: Underworld

Lara Croft should be doing *Shawshank*-esque time—the athletic archaeologist has almost single-handedly wiped out some of the world's rarest species. To avenge our endangered brethren, why not let the sharks in *Underworld's* scuba diving opening nibble her down to size? Just be careful to avoid the speargun.

Ichiro

Okami

Or, as we like to refer to him, "the cartoon killer fish that's made up of two enchanted crabs." PS2's arty wolf-centric adventure sees hairy, four-legged goddess Amaterasu battle this magic shark in a sunken ship. She needs all her homicidal paintbrush skills, too, because cheaty jerk Ichiro can summon thunderstorms.

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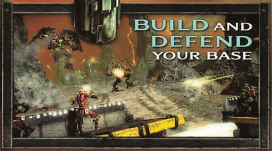

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